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The Development of Professional Expertise through Reflection in the Principalship

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE THROUGH REFLECTION IN THE PRINCIPALSHIP

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ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

The study of principals as learners is important because the landscape of public education is changing. Schools are becoming more diverse and the demands on schools more varied and complex. The role of the principal is increasingly ambiguous, complex, and varied. Principals must adapt and develop their professional practice. Effective principals learn from experience to meet the shifting expectations of the role and the needs of the school.

Multiple learning experiences help principals become more proficient in their jobs. Initial certification, induction into the role, continuing professional education, and learning from experiences are means to the development of expertise. This study provided a rich description of how principals learn from on-the-job experiences through reflective practices and how reflection can develop expertise.

This study was concerned with school principals as learners and how principals can learn from experiences. Principals develop expertise through reflecting on their practice. The study examined how principals learn from experience, how principals monitor their understanding and practice, how principals integrate new understandings into practice, and how principals reframe their understandings based on experience.

The conceptual framework for this study included the literature on the development of expertise, reflective practice, and cognition. Literature on principal preparation, induction, and continuing education are included. Reflective practice as a means to learn from experience and develop professional expertise are addressed in depth.

The research methods for this study are grounded in phenomenology. Phenomenological research methods focus on the meaning of lived experience of principals. The results provide a rich description of how school principals learn from experiences situated in practice through reflection.

The essences of the experiences of how principals learn from experiences in practice are the ability to learn from experiences through reflective meaning construction, the principal's ability to regulate learning and practice, and the ability to exercise professional judgment in practice. The participants described the ability to reflect on practice and regulate learning and performance. The phenomena as experienced by the principals in this study form a model of professional expertise in the principalship.

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DEDICATION

To Kim and the boys

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The need for new school principals is indisputable. Some estimate that 50% of current school principals will leave the field in the next five years; 25% of current principals are eligible to retire by 2004 (Lauder, 2000). The pipeline of willing and prepared candidates is not available due to the increasing demands on the role. Given the impending shortage and the increasing demands of the role, additional candidates must be prepared for long-term success. "The only long-term solution is to increase the number of outstanding candidates, including women and minorities, who want to become administrators (Lashway & Anderson, 1997, p. 73). In order to develop current principals to meet the demands of the role, prepare professionals to assume the role, and to retain current principals, continuing professional education must be a priority.

Why focus on the learning needs of principals? The principal is the leverage position for school improvement. There are currently approximately 100,000 school principals in the United States, whereas there are 3.5 million teachers and 53 million students. "Strengthening the skills and knowledge of the nation's 100,000 principals is likely to have more immediate payoff in raising student performance than any other area of school improvement because it is central to raising standards, improving

teacher quality, and holding schools accountable for results" (National Staff Development Council [NSDC], 2000, p. 1). Leadership is critical for school improvement. In the effort to improve student learning for 53 million students, initiatives focused on improving the learning conditions through building-level leadership have a place in overall improvement initiatives. In addition, one in three principals leaves his/her position involuntarily (Bulach, Pickett, & Boothe, 1998). They cited poor human relation skills or excessive task orientation and poor interpersonal communication as key mistakes that lead to involuntary termination as principal. Other key deficiencies are lack of problem solving, decision making, and monitoring. Given the need for new principals and the need to retain current principals, ensuring success of superior principals entering the profession demands to be heightened.

Background of the Problem

The motivation to explore the learning needs of school principals is rooted in several factors related to the role and to schools, including changing schools and changing society. One of the most commonly cited societal changes is the increasing diversity of the student population in public schools in the United States. A related issue is the multiple languages spoken by school-age children (Daresh, 1997). In addition, "the social fabric is unraveling for many children and their families"

(Shipman & Murphy, 2000, p. 99). As society continues to change, schools must respond to societal needs.

In response to societal changes, a number of school reforms have been established. Reform proposals have an effect on all current principals. However, Daresh (1997) reported the need for additional research on the effects of school reform proposals on novice principals. "The impact on instruction brought about by accountability derived from centralized assessment schemes" is one such reform (Daresh, 1997, p. 5). High-stakes testing, which is often perceived as a measure of the effectiveness of principals and teachers, is a trend in American education that is likely to continue for quite a while. Vouchers are another reform initiative that is shaping schools. A third example of the changing schools is decentralization, which increases the autonomy of local schools and enables the local leadership to make decisions based on the needs of the local community (Veenman, 1996). Site-based management is one strategy for working with decentralization.

New knowledge and skills are needed for administrators (Mulkeen & Cooper, 1992). Schools must shift from bureaucratic hierarchies to flatter, more collaborative organizations. Roles of administrators must change to facilitate this new kind of learning community. The role of the principal must move from a centralized managerial role to collaborative leadership roles. "Principals must be prepared to create conditions for a professional teaching force by sharing planning and decision-making responsibilities with the staff" (Mulkeen & Cooper, 1992, p. 1). Principals

must develop and use democratic leadership styles (Schmidt, Kosmoski, & Pollack, 1998).

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) reported three central changes in schools that require new models of leadership (Shipman & Murphy, 2000). One change is the redefinition of teaching and learning through developments and understandings of "knowledge, intelligence, assessment and instruction" (Shipman & Murphy, 2000, p. 100). In addition, the knowledge base on how people learn, including cognitive science, is ever expanding. Second, schools are becoming more community focused and less bureaucratic and hierarchical. Finally, stakeholders, including parents and community and business leaders, will have increasingly significant roles in schooling. School leaders are also more involved in political bodies such as community and parent organizations (Daresh, 1997).

Sets of common standards for school leaders were absent until the development of the ISLLC standards. "The standards present a common core of knowledge, dispositions, and performances that will help link leadership more forcefully to productive schools and enhanced educational outcomes" (Shipman & Murphy, 2000, p. 97). A brief summary of the ISLLC standards indicates principals as school leaders promote student success through: (1) implementing a vision of learning, (2) nurturing the school culture and instructional programs, (3) ensuring an effective learning environment, (4) collaborating with parents and community members, (5) acting ethically, and (6) influencing the societal context.

The use of such standards as the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders can provide new perspectives on leadership that respond to the research on educational leadership and productive schools and to the trends in schools and society. The ISLLC standards have been adopted by the State of Illinois as the Professional School Leader Standards.

"Both the initial preparation and professional development of principals must be overhauled to ensure that tomorrow's principals have the skills and knowledge they need. Much of the current training that principals receive is too academic, too abstract, or too focused on budgeting and other managerial tasks" (NSDC, 2000, p. 1).

The broad concern of this research was to study the continuing professional education of school principals. The continuing professional education of principals is important because of the changing nature of society, the changing nature of schools, and the resulting change in the role. Further, principals, even with the graduate degree and professional certification, must continue to learn from experience. The focus of the study was on the principal as a learner and how continuing professional education can lead the principal to meet these demands.

The study of continuing professional education of principals is important because as the landscape of public education is changing, schools are becoming more diverse and the demands on schools more varied and complex. The role of the principal is increasingly ambiguous, complex, and varied. Each professional in the school setting must adapt and develop his/her professional practice. Effective

principals learn from experience to meet the shifting expectations for the role and the needs of the school.

Professional development opportunities are available to principals. Principals receive initial learning experiences through graduate certification programs. Principals also have access to out-of-the-building learning opportunities including professional conferences and networks. Both networks and conferences are useful tools for the continuing education of principals. However, these strategies require that the principal leave the setting of their practice. Alternatively, reflective practice is a professional learning strategy that is available to a principal anytime and anyplace.

The research literature on the role of the school principal is broad and varied. The many aspects of the role are addressed. For example, there is ample research examining the principal's role as instructional leader and staff developer. The state of the research on principals as learners is less well developed and organized around dominant themes and structures. Principal preparation programs receive ample attention in the literature, usually focused on questions of effectiveness and the efficacy of implementing reforms. Research on beginning principals addresses the adjustment to the role, the forces that impact new principals, and the socialization process. Less is written on the continuing professional development needs of principals and the effectiveness of those development activities. There has been a

lack of research on how principals learn from experience, and the movement from novice to expert has not been explored in this profession.

Central Question

This study was concerned with school principals as learners and how principals can learn from on-the-job experiences. Learning from experience can help the principal develop knowledge and skills so that the principal develops expertise along the career life span. Learning from experience through reflective practice is one way principals can move along the novice-to-expert continuum (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). The aspect of the continuing professional education this study addressed was the development of expertise through reflective practice. Experts have the ability to reflect on their learning and knowledge. How do principals develop expertise through reflecting on their practice? The study examined how principals learn from experience, how principals monitor their understanding and practice, how principals integrate new understandings into practice, and how principals reframe their understandings based on experience.

Purpose of the Study

Multiple learning experiences help professionals become more competent and proficient in their jobs. Initial certification and initial socialization into the role influence the development of knowledge and skills for principals. Beyond the formal

certification process and induction into the profession, continuing professional education and learning from experience are two primary means to the development of knowledge and skills. This study provides a rich description of how principals learn from on-the-job experiences through reflective practices and how reflection can develop the knowledge and skills to develop competence. The process of critical reflection as engaged in by school principals is an important element of reflective practice.

The ability to learn from practice is essential in meeting the increasing complexity and ambiguity of the role. The role of the principal is increasing in demands and principals have limited time to engage in formal professional development learning experiences. Reflecting on practice is a process that can facilitate professional learning.

The implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) had a profound impact on the role of the principal. The NCLB Act mandates raising the achievement of all children in public schools. The NCLB Act expands the role of the principal in several ways. The Education Research Service (ERS) indicates that "the NCLB adds substantially to the principal's responsibilities and accountability for student achievement, staff quality, the quality and legitimacy of the school's curriculum and instruction, and so forth" (as qtd. in McLeod, D'Amico, & Protheroe, 2003, p. 2). The federal law dictates the definition of instructional leadership. The demands on the principal to meet the needs and

demands of all stakeholders and be held accountable to the same stakeholders are shifting the nature of the role.

Principals have long been committed to meeting the needs of their students and communities. Now the needs of the students and communities are changing. There is a federal mandate and public scrutiny for increased accountability. Educators are learning more about how people learn and are learning how to implement new strategies. Schools are becoming more community focused and accountable and inclusive of stakeholders, and schools are becoming more decentralized in their structure with a more collaborative style of leadership. All of these changes place demands on the school principal. Principals report role overload, increased ambiguity of the role, demanding compliance issues, and more vexing social issues.

Research Questions

The specific research questions pertaining to how current principals use reflective strategies to further their professional learning and problem solving were:

1. How do principals question themselves in practice?
2. What are the different processes of reflection used by principals?
3. What strategies do principals use to develop an evolving level of competence?
4. How do principals learn from experience?

5. How do principals monitor their understanding, practice, and the development of competence?

6. How do principals integrate new understandings into practice?

7. How do principals reframe their understandings based on experiences?

Justification for the Study

The study of the development of expertise through reflective practice is broadly justified by the literature on reflective practice and the theories of expertise. Cervero (1988), Daley (2000, 2001), and Mott (1996, 2000) all articulated theories of expertise that hold reflective practice as a key component. This study was built on the knowledge bases of cognitive psychology including constructivist learning theory, transformative learning, and situated cognition.

Ericsson and Charness (1994) indicated that "exceptional performance is knowledge and skills acquired through experience" (p. 725). The acquisition of the knowledge and skills is a "human information processing" or cognitive approach. Tan (1997) described seven elements of expertise: (1) experts are highly knowledgeable and skilled in the application of knowledge, (2) experts store information in patterns in long-term memory and are able to recognize relationships, (3) experts are more insightful in pattern recognition, (4) experts have a better understanding of problem analysis and work forward from known facts ("forward reasoning"), (5) experts develop automaticity of skills, (6) experts store knowledge in

recognizable chunks in long- and short-term memory, and (7) experts have superior self- monitoring skills and self-knowledge. It is this last element in which this study was most interested.

The study was also built on the knowledge base of reflective practice, including action learning and critical reflection. Principals learn from experience and develop deep understanding that is organized into mental models that facilitate access and problem solving. Experts have contextualized cognitive structures which they know how to apply to problems. Experts also monitor their understanding and practice. Processes of reflection can facilitate learning from experience, the organization of knowledge, problem solving, and monitoring of practice and learning.

Methodology

The broad methodology enabled the researcher to study the reflective strategies of a principal's professional learning and problem solving through a qualitative study in which rich descriptions were sought of the phenomena of principals who reflect. The purpose was to critically analyze the strategies principals use to improve their practice.

Expert levels of performance require mastery of knowledge and skills. In the areas of expertise, 10 years of full-time preparation are considered the minimum period of attainment (Ericsson & Charness, 1994). Since expertise is acquired over time, principals were selected with a range of experiences. Berliner (1988) described

the development of expertise in teaching following five benchmarks along a continuum: novice, advanced beginner, competent teacher, proficient teacher, and expert teacher. This continuum is based on the model of skill acquisition presented by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1985). Studies of expertise in teaching indicate that expertise is highly context-specific (Siedentop & Eldar, 1989).

Study participants were selected in the following manner. All participants were selected from a large, local suburban school district. Permission was sought and received from the superintendent. The principals were recruited to ensure a gender balance, a continuum of training and administrative experience, and grade level.

The phenomena of interest in this study were how principals question themselves, how principals reflect, how principals monitor their development, and how principals learn from experience. The methods were designed to identify the learning that results from the integration of experience and reflection and the integration of professional knowledge and practice.

The qualitative methodology was intended to contribute to the theory and practice of professional learning by focusing on the meaning of the participant's experiences. The nature of the research questions dictated a qualitative study through the exploration of experiences of participants, with the expected result of proposing a model of professional learning for principals. In this study, "the researcher is an instrument of data collection" (Creswell, 1998, p. 14). As a qualitative study using

interviews and other highly interactive methodologies, the researcher's thinking entered into the processes of data collection and analysis.

Conceptualization

The conceptualization or underlying orientation of this study of the development of expert performance through reflective practice was rooted in cognitive psychology and situated cognition. "The basic premise is that knowledge is situated; that is, it is the product both of the activity being undertaken as well as the context and the culture in which the activity is accomplished. The underlying significance of situated cognition is that it affects views of how learning is accomplished" (Prestine & LeGrand, 1991, p. 68). Reflective practice is critical to continuing professional education towards expert performance because it is how experts solve problems. Experts self-monitor and self-correct their practice (Coombs, 2001). This study sought to understand the principals' perceptions of the evolution of competence in the role. It also sought to describe the strategies of reflection and how they contribute to the evolution of competence; therefore, a linear, uniform developmental stage model of development of expertise did not bind the study. The criticisms of stage models are well documented. Human growth and development cannot be reduced to mechanistic steps. Rather, this study sought to describe phenomena germane to continuing professional education through reflection.

Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1992) and Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) described school leadership as problem solving. Expert leadership is the overarching construct that encompasses transformational, instructional, situational, and transactional leadership. Leadership as problem solving also encompasses the significant roles of the principalship, including developing a shared vision, influencing others, and capacity building. This view of leadership is grounded in cognitive psychology.

Prestine and LeGrand (1991) argued for modeling expert problem-solving processes in the preparation of educational administrators through cognitive apprenticeships. Reflection is one such problem-solving process. "In the process of educational administration, the ability to reflect and interpret may be the most valuable asset the practitioner can possess" (p. 73).

Many researchers have addressed the development of professional expertise. Schon's model of reflective professional practice is a theory of expertise. Cervero (1988) and Daley (2000, 2001) each brought cognitive psychology and reflective practice together into a theory of expertise. Mott (1996, 2000) described reflective practice, skill acquisition, and cognitive psychology that all have a role in the development of expertise. Eraut (1994) described expertise as a deliberative process of reflection.

The conceptual framework for this study brought together the literature on the development of expertise, specific literature on reflective practice, and literature on

cognitive psychology inclusive of cognitive and metacognitive processes of thought and reasoning, which have been addressed through Mezirow's theory of transformative learning.

Background Literature

The broad literature that supports and informs this study of the development of expert performance is in the work of Dewey, Lewin, Piaget, and Lindeman. Dewey (1938) described learning embedded in experience. The philosophy of progressivism reflects the relationship of experience and education and the social factors that influence individual experience and emphasizes the freedom of the learner. The primary aim is the expression and cultivation of the individual through experience.

Dewey's (1938) philosophy of progressive education was rooted in a philosophy of experience. Learning should be derived from daily experiences. The material to be learned must be within the present life experience of the learner. The objectives of learning are in the future, but the immediate materials for learning are in the present experience. Problems can stimulate thinking when they grow out of the conditions of the experiences. The new information that emerges from problem solving is the grounds for future experiences. In order for experiences to be educative, they must lead to an expanding base of knowledge.

Dewey's philosophy of education articulated that learning occurs through experience, at the interface of the individual and the environment. Progressive

education reflected the social factors that influence individual experience. In addition, this philosophy suggested that learning must occur within the experiences of the learner. Learning through experience will enable the learner to transfer his/her learning to new experiences.

Specific authors and studies that are closest to the problem are:

1. The role of the principal as described by ISSLC standards and key authors on school leadership, including Bass, Sergiovanni, Barnett, and Barth, are important to this study.

2. Literature on continuing professional education, including Cervero and Houle, is important to this study. Specific literature on the continuing professional education of principals, including Eraut, Daresh, and Conley, serves as a taking-off point. Models of the development of professional expertise by Cervero, Schon, Daley, and Mott are important as well.

3. Reflective practice as a means for principals to learn from experience and develop professional expertise is a foundation of the study. Reflection in action, theories of action (espoused theories and theories in use), reflection for action, reflection on action as described by Schon and others including Imel, Kottkamp, and Osterman are described. Critical reflection on experiences is a form of reflection as articulated by Brookfield. Critical reflection on assumptions is important to understand transformative learning as studied by Mezirow.

4. Cognitive psychology, including constructivist learning theory, situated cognition, and transformative learning, is addressed. According to Mezirow's studies, assumptions frame the interpretation of experience. Studies on critical self-reflection describe processes of becoming aware and revising assumptions, including the nature of assumptions, processes of reflection, and types of reflection.

There is value in considering Fenwick's (2000) typology of experiential learning. She defined experiential learning as a "process of human cognition" (p. 244). She then described five different perspectives of cognition. The purpose of the typology was to challenge the dominant view of cognition through reflective construction of meaning. She wrote, "The need to disrupt and resist reductionist, binary, individualized notions of experiential learning and pose alternate conceptions becomes urgent" (p. 244). The dominant view of cognition is, however, exactly the reflective construction of meaning that Cervero (1988) and Daley (2000, 2001) were describing. Reflective construction of meaning is inclusive of both constructivist learning theory and transformative learning theory.

Fenwick (2000) and Daley (2000) differed on the perspective of situated cognition. Daley was inclusive of situated cognition in the constructivist mode of learning, whereas Fenwick established a situative perspective as one of the five conceptions of perspectives of cognition, one that differs from the constructivist perspective.

Fenwick (2000) distilled the theory and practice of reflection on experience as a process of knowledge creation and personal meaning making. The constructivist perspective of cognition is a theory that maintains that humans form cognitive structures based on experience and learning. Fenwick (2000) wrote, "A learner is believed to construct, through reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world" (p. 248). She cited Kolb (1984) and Schon (1983) as primary contributors to the constructivist perspective in adult education. Fenwick also cited Brookfield (1987) and Mezirow (1990, 1996) as primary contributors to critical reflection as a constructivist learning process.

Fenwick (2000) differentiated the situative perspective from other perspectives of cognition. Situated cognition focused more on the learning as a result of the interaction of the individual and the context. In this sense, knowledge and the meaning-making process cannot be separated from the situation in which it was created. "Thus, knowing is interminably inventive and entwined with doing" (p. 253). The situated cognition perspective challenges the constructivist perspective by challenging that adults do not learn from experience, they learn in experience. Meaning is specific to a particular context. The key distinction is the extent to which the individual is independent of the context. The theories of situated cognition and constructivist learning theory are important in the discussion of the implications of the descriptions of the phenomenon.

Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) presented a compelling argument for their beliefs that learning and knowledge are situated in the activity and culture in which they occur:

> Recent investigations of learning, however, challenge the separating of what is learned from how it is learned and used. The activity in which knowledge is developed and deployed, it is now argued, is not separable from or ancillary to learning and cognition. Nor is it neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of what is learned. Situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity. Learning and cognition, it is now possible to argue, are fundamentally situated. (p. 32)

Brown et al. (1989) began with the premise that activity is central to learning. The premise is supported by illustrating that knowledge is context-dependent through vocabulary acquisition. Further, they provide the analogy of knowledge as a tool, that deep understanding is the result of the use of knowledge. Knowledge is only truly known in use. The tool analogy is extended to include enculturation and the beliefs of the culture determine how the tool is used. Through this progression of ideas and relationships, they illustrated that activity, conceptual knowledge, and culture are interdependent. Therefore, in order to understand a concept, the individual must use the concept within an activity, whose use is defined by the culture.

Brown et al. (1989) describe authentic activities as those activities that are coherent, meaningful, and purposeful to community members. Coherence means that the meaning of the activity is accessible to community members. The meaning and purpose of activities are determined through the use of the activities within the

community. "Authentic activities then, are most simply defined as the ordinary practices of the culture" (p. 34).

The activities of practitioners and ordinary people are situated "in the cultures in which they work, within which they negotiate meanings and construct understanding" (Brown et al., 1989, p. 35). The activity itself creates the boundary conditions for the activity. In addition, the context is instrumental in solving problems that arise within the activity. Practitioners and "just plain folks" use the elements of their environment to solve problems that emerge. The cognition required to solve problems is embedded in the context (p. 36).

As stated earlier, authentic activity is one of three central components of learning, along with conceptual knowledge and culture. Authentic activities reinforce the notion that both learning and knowledge are situated in the context in which they occur. The notion of cognitive apprenticeship is a way to engage students in authentic activities. "Cognitive apprenticeship methods try to enculturate students into authentic practices through activity and social interaction" (Brown et al., 1989, p. 37). Cognitive apprenticeship leads to participation in the activities of a culture. Through participation, members participate in the social construction of the belief system of the culture as well as the shared understanding.

Cognitive apprenticeship is a way of learning through authentic activities that lead to participation in the culture. As a participant, the individual becomes a part of the social network and develops the language and the belief system of the network.

Being a member of the social network promotes enculturation. Cognitive apprenticeship involves the participant in the activity, concepts, and the culture necessary for learning and cognition.

The broad literature leads to this study of how principals use reflective strategies to learn from experience and monitor their practice by weaving together the existing strands of the literature. The role of the principal, the changing demands of the role, and the knowledge areas for the role are well documented. The literature bases on continuing professional education and the professional development strategies are also well documented. The use of reflective strategies in the professions and the use of reflective strategies in principal preparation are well documented. A gap exists in the literature on how principals can use reflective strategies to learn from experience. The literature base on reflective practice is deep enough to justify it as an effective strategy for moving principals toward expert performance. Furthermore, few studies have documented how principals reframe understanding based on experience and how the assumptions of principals frame learning from practice. The heart of this study is at the intersection of learning from experience and reflection.

This study will contribute to the literature by providing a description of the reflective strategies used by principals. The study examined how principals learn from experience, how principals monitor their understanding and practice, how principals integrate new understandings into practice, and how principals reframe their understandings based on experiences.

This study of how principals can learn from experience through reflective strategies is significant because it contributes to the knowledge base of both adult education and education administration. The knowledge bases of these disciplines do not intersect well or often. The study advances the fields of adult education and education administration by bringing together thinking on situated cognition, transformative learning, reflective practice, and the development of expertise. The confluence of these theories can contribute to the practice of education administrators by describing effective strategies for learning from experiences and monitoring understanding and practice. In doing so, administrators can become more competent and proficient in their practice. The development of expert performance by current administrators can help address the serious challenges in schools today.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The continuing professional education (CPE) of principals is essential to develop the kinds of professionals required to meet the changing needs of students, schools, and society. The use of reflective strategies provides practicing principals with tools for professional growth and learning that are available any time. This study was supported by the literature in adult learning and education administration.

Four areas of the literature are reviewed for this dissertation. First, a foundation is laid of the adult education literature on systems of continuing professional education. Then components of a system of continuing education for principals are addressed including principal preparation programs, principal induction, and continuing education. Third, a more detailed examination of the literature on the continuing education of principals is discussed, including reflective practice and critical reflection. Finally, a model of professional learning for principals is considered. A concept map of the relationships of each of these components concludes the chapter.

A System of Continuing Education

The purpose of this section is to give an overview of the literature on continuing professional education and provide a foundation for the analysis of the continuing professional education of principals. Cervero (2000) issued the call for a system of continuing education that will meet the challenges of professionals in the current work world. He characterized the current system as "primitive." "I would characterize them as *devoted mainly to updating practitioners about the newest developments, which are transmitted in didactic fashion and offered by a pluralistic group of providers (workplaces, for-profits, and universities) that do not work together in any coordinated fashion"* (p. 4, original emphasis). In his call for a new system and his assessment of the current state of affairs, he expressed the need to (1) move beyond the update model, (2) address the question of political forces in continuing professional education, and (3) coordinate providers. These three issues will be explicated further.

To understand Cervero's critique of continuing professional education, it is important to understand Nowlen's (1988) three approaches to continuing professional education. Nowlen described three approaches to CPE as follows: the update model, the competence model, and the performance model. The update model is consistent with the critique offered by Cervero in the preceding paragraph. "These heavily didactic short courses pursue the central aim of keeping professionals up to date in their practices" (Nowlen, 1988, p. 24). Nowlen continued by explaining the structure

of knowledge and the way in which professionals develop understanding influences the approach to continuing professional education. The competence model develops the knowledge, skills, and predisposition of the professions and, more to the point, places skills and attitudes within the work of a professional. According to Mott (2000), Nowlen's performance model addressed the limitations of the previous two approaches and is based on central precepts of professional practice. "The performance model is based on three basic precepts of professional practice: first, practicing professionals are individuals, influenced by their environment, self-images, roles, and values; second, professionals practice in complex networks of interdependent systems; third, complex performance cannot be significantly affected by a single form of intervention" (Mott, 2000, p. 25).

Cervero (1988) articulated three issues that must be addressed in building a system of continuing education. The first issue is the need to move beyond the update model towards the improvement of professional practice through the integration of continuing education and daily practice of professionals. Second, Cervero raised questions about who benefits from professional education and the influence of political and economic forces on professional learning. Finally, Cervero called for collaborative partnerships among providers of continuing education, which are characterized by clear goals, contributions, and benefits. In the identification of issues, Cervero underscored the essential elements of a system of continuing professional education, the components, and the relationships between and among the

components. He emphasized the importance of the relationships between the components.

Cervero's articulation of trends and issues did not identify the essential components of the system of continuing professional education. Knox (2000), in his writing on the continuum of professional education and practice, began to address Cervero's omission of explicit components of the system. The continuum of professional education would begin with preprofessional education and continue through continuing professional education, thereby identifying two essential system components, preprofessional education and continuing education. Knox did not differentiate the components of preprofessional education.

Houle (1980) was more explicit when he formulated the life span of professional learning. The basic model included general education, selection to advanced study, specialized education, certification of competence, and continuing education. At this point, Houle provided the most complete listing of the components of a system of continuing professional education, and the review of the literature will continue to use this frame to examine the professional education of principals, with one addition.

Eraut (1994) wrote at length about the nature and development of professional knowledge, competence, and expertise. His primary emphasis was on learning from experience, situated in practice. "Professionals continually learn on the job, because their work entails engagement in a succession of cases, problems, or projects which

they have to learn about" (p. 10). He added to the continuum the notion of initial professional education:

> Research into professional development, however, suggests that the initial period during which novice professionals develop their proficiency in the general professional role continues well beyond their initial qualification. Indeed, the first two or three years after qualifying are probably the most influential in developing a particular personalized pattern of practice that every professional acquires. (p. 11)

Eraut's commentary emphasized the relationship between the components of the system of continuing professional education. He added that initial professional education has not been established to develop the learning qualities required for continuing education and that the emphasis on theory in preparation programs is inefficient.

Houle (1980) provided a list of 14 goals of professional education. The goals were divided into three groups: (1) conceptual characteristics, (2) performance characteristics, and (3) collective characteristics. The conceptual goal defines the function of the profession. The four performance characteristics are mastery of theoretical knowledge, capacity to solve problems, use of practical knowledge, and self-enhancement. The remaining goals describe the relationships of the professionals.

Knox (2000) suggested several considerations of the continuum of professional education and in doing so explicated several relationships between components of the system. First, the specific characteristics of the profession should determine the goals of professional education. In other words, what is the relationship

of the profession to the goals of professional education? Second, coordination of preprofessional educators can assist with the induction of new professionals. Third, preprofessional education should be designed to foster continuing education in individuals. The presence of a continuum of professional education may foster professional learning communities. Fourth, professional ways of knowing and perspective transformations are components of the continuum. Finally, professional education can foster personal development as well.

Knox (2000) further develops a set of guidelines for the development of the continuum of professional education and practice which includes coordination of program components, responsiveness to learners, encouraging application, and stakeholder support. He called for the coordination of program components across the continuum and notes that the emphasis on any particular component may vary along the continuum. Program components include program goals, activities, providers, resources, context, and negotiation. Of particular note are the goals, activities, and context.

Knox (2000) summarized Houle and indicated that more than half of continuing education is self-directed. "Professional education programs should build on, encourage, and complement self-directed learning" (p. 15). Knox indicated likely benefits of reinforcement of self-directed learning include "active learning, increased application, and greater demand for challenging professional education" (p. 16). The issue of context addresses the societal forces that impact a profession, including

"supply and demand for people to work in the profession, obsolescence of professional knowledge, and the willingness of people to pay the cost of the education" (p. 16). All of these direct influences are relevant and have a bearing on the continuum of professional education of principals in that the nature of schools, students, and the role are changing.

The other guidelines for the development of the continuum include the learners, stakeholders, and application of learning. Responsiveness to learners across the continuum entails attention to individual learner characteristics and societal influences towards the ends of participation and empowerment. Multiple stakeholders influence the quality of education along the continuum. Finally, "a major goal of the entire continuum of professional education is to encourage learners to apply what they learn, with resulting individual and organizational benefits" (Knox, 2000, p. 17). Relevance of the learning is a major theme in the literature on principal education.

Eraut's (1994) description of the interrelationships and interdependencies of components of the system address the components of professional learning of principals:

> Both the ongoing development and the diffusion of good practice depend on the capacity of mid-career professionals to continue learning both on and off the job. Thus the quality of initial professional education and post-initial on-the-job learning depends on the quality of practice; and that, in turn, depends on the continuing education of mid-career professions. The problems of initial qualification cannot be considered to be independent of those of post-qualification learning nor even of those of mid-career professional education. (p. 41)

Dimensions of the Literature on Principals as Learners

Principal Preparation Programs

Principal preparation programs are typically master's-degree-level graduate programs in education administration that lead to state certification. The programs are designed to produce effective school leaders who create school environments that enhance student learning (McCarthy, 1999). One purpose of the typical program is to provide opportunities for principal candidates to learn the discipline of educational administration (Friedman & Watkins, 1992), although this purpose leads to a common criticism of education administration programs. "The most common complaint is the lack of relevance to real life in schools" (Lashway & Anderson, 1997, p. 78). The emphasis on theory and limited use of real-life experience leads to the critique that the current preparation programs are too academic. Graduate programs cannot replicate the craft of leadership but "may provide a philosophical grounding that will influence many of the administrator's later decisions" (Lashway & Anderson, 1997, p. 78). The lack of relevance and academic orientation has led to low student satisfaction with preparation programs (McCarthy, 1999).

In a review of the literature, McCarthy (1999) identified two other gaps in the research. One is the lack of research that supports the notion that preparation programs produce effective leaders. She cites that American education leaders are no better than their European counterparts who are not required to have graduate-level

preparation. Second, she cites that measures of leader effectiveness, including impact on student learning, cannot be tied to graduate school training in education administration.

The lack of demonstrated effectiveness and participant dissatisfaction of education administration preparation programs has led to a variety of reforms. The reforms include the use of instructional strategies that integrate theoretical frameworks and real-world problems. An example by Osterman (1998) of such strategies is presented below. Other reforms include field-based experiences and capstone internships. "The most effective programs use practical teaching methods such as role play, simulation activities, internships, and mentoring to encourage students to transfer their theoretical knowledge to the practice of educational leadership" (Peel, Wallace, Buckner, Wrenn, & Evans, 1998, p. 27). Recent trends in effective preparation programs include alignment of entrance requirements to the role and a focus on adult learning methodologies, including an emphasis on reflective practice, cohort models, and individualization (Lauder, 2000).

Osterman (1998) reported a theoretical model of reflective practice as a professional development strategy for prospective administrators, which can lead to improved performance. She reported the integration of theory and action in the education administration classroom to lead to competent action:

> The learning cycle begins with personal theory and experience rather than formal knowledge base and gives equal recognition to both, permitting and encouraging students to critically examine both. As students engage in the process of gathering and analyzing data as a means to develop and testing

> theory, "theory" becomes demystified, more accessible, and perhaps more legitimate. (p. 14)

The model as Osterman presented it is an alternative to the predominant education administration classroom which is more focused on theory. She recommended reducing the boundaries between theory and practice by including both in the classroom in an effort to integrate theory into practice. The strategy she proposed includes engaging the learner through real school problems, exploring personal beliefs, developing knowledge and experience through dialogue and observation related to the problem, and providing opportunities for application. This strategy of graduate school preparation may address the criticisms that programs are too academic and lack relevance. Through this process, prospective administrators would see the formal knowledge base as important and relevant.

The connections of the theoretical model and classroom strategy have strong connections to the adult education literature. The model seeks to surface and potentially change the individual's professional practice "theories-in-use" as described by Argyris and Schon (1974). The classroom strategies surface the deeply held beliefs and assumptions that shape behavior. Successful professional development explores and modifies existing theories in use (Osterman, 1998).

Beginning Principals

The research on beginning principals illustrates the professional development needs of new school leaders. Daresh (1997) provided three categories of needs:

technical skills, socialization, and sense of self. The first need of beginning principals is for basic technical skills including information on budgeting, legal aspects of the role, and personnel. Some of these same managerial themes emerge in the research on induction programs of new principals. The most urgent problems were teacher recruitment and selection; secondary issues were building maintenance (Male, 2001b). Beginning principals needed additional budget skills. Focused training was used for skill acquisition.

The second need of beginning principals identified through research by Daresh (1997) was the need to fit in with new colleagues and into the new setting. The socialization into the leadership role is also discussed by Parkay who identified five stages of socialization into the principalship: survival, control, stability, educational leadership, and professional actualization (Lashway & Anderson, 1997). Duncan, Sequin, and Spaulding (1999) presented a case study of a first-year woman principal and an ethnographic study of five women principals. The purpose of both the case study and the ethnography is to understand the nature of the effect of gender and socialization on power and success as perceived by others. Both studies identified the role of power in fitting in with new colleagues and into new settings.

The third need identified by Daresh (1997) was a sense of self as a leader through personal values, ethics, and vision. Schmidt et al. (1998) sought to determine what measurable and significant personality and stylistic preference changes occurred after a three-year period of a new administrative position. They

found that principals "became more serious and sober, . . . more expedient and practical, . . . more suspicious and hard to fool, . . . more controlled and exacting, . . . [and] more tense, driven, and overwrought" (p. 6). The leadership style of the new principals "became more thinking and less feeling on [the] Myers Briggs" (p. 9). The researchers found that the shifts were detrimental to beginning administrators and suggest more emphasis on democratic leadership beliefs and practices is needed.

Induction programs can help support new principals in the transition to the role and address the needs identified above. Isolation is a common problem for new principals who do not have opportunities to collaborate with peers. Lack of feedback also contributes to socialization issues (Lashway & Anderson, 1997). The isolation is compounded for women and minorities. "Consequently, minorities and women continue to find themselves in the role of pioneer--a status that can add to the loneliness felt by every newcomer" (p. 90).

Male (2001a), in his studies of the experiences of beginning headteachers and principals, examined how new principals deal with external influences. The findings indicated that the actions of central government, new legislation, new curricula, and improvement projects are identified as exerting the most external pressure. The new principals report that parents exert the highest pressure at the school level. Governing bodies exert a secondary pressure.

An area for further review is the current research on the International Beginning Principals Study (IBPS). The study has six primary research questions.

The one that has the most relevance to this review is, "What learning experiences help new headteachers/principals adjust to their role?" (Male, 2001a, p. 1).

Continuing Professional Education

Mott (2000) indicated that the purpose of continuing professional education is to improve professional competence and practice. The importance of professional development activities during the beginning three years of the principalship has been documented. Professional development, or continuing professional education, continues throughout the career of the principal. Sadly, for some principals, professional development ends at the conclusion of the preparation program. Principals learn most of what they know through experience (Brown, Anfara, Hartman, Mahar, & Mills, 2001; Eraut, 1994). This section is organized around several building blocks for the continuing education of principals. This section will examine the areas of knowledge to be addressed, specific suggested content topics and effective strategies in the literature for principal development, and conclude with how principals learn best.

Friedman and Watkins (1992) indicated that 13 research-based domains of knowledge determined through a review of the literature should serve as the content base for administrative staff development. Brown et al. (2001) identified three major areas of knowledge and skills for middle-level principals: how to create a collaborative school culture; implementing new teaching and learning approaches;

and updates on legal, budget, and technology issues. Veenman (1996) identified seven situations for principals to be prepared to address. Other studies are more narrowly focused on specific issues such as what kinds of software applications principals need to learn (Kajs et al., 1999). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) (2000) indicated that principals' professional development should include change processes, staff development strategies, data-driven decision making, public engagements, and instructional leadership.

Eraut (1994) provided a detailed analysis of the nature of professional knowledge for principals. He began by making the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge. The criticism that principal preparation programs are too heavily focused on theoretical knowledge has already been documented. Eraut approached the distinction as misleading and incomplete. He argued that professionals hold their own theories that may not be explicit but do affect their behavior. The overlapping and interdependent areas of experiential knowledge are worth explicating here.

Eraut (1994) provided six categories of experiential knowledge of school managers that are meant to include the theoretical knowledge typically included in the formal knowledge base of books and courses. Knowledge of people is the intuitive judgments about individuals that are the result of interactions. Situational knowledge is

> acquired in a manner that is partly accidental and partly purposive, involving some discussion and deliberation but also a lot of intuitive assumptions. As

> with knowledge of people, the quality of the information will depend on how it is filtered through the receiver's perceptual frameworks and on whether it is based on an adequate sample. (p. 78)

Thus, both knowledge of situations and knowledge of people are highly intuitive and filter through existing knowledge. Knowledge of educational practice is central to the principal as instructional leader. It is the knowledge about curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, and organizational structures. The individual principal's personal theories and situational knowledge will shape the utility of new knowledge about educational practice. Process knowledge is the "knowledge of how to do things" (p. 81). Conceptual knowledge is the next area of knowledge in Eraut's framework. "Conceptual knowledge is defined as that set of concepts, theories and ideas that a person consciously stores in memory. It is available for use in analyzing issues of problems or debating policies and practices" (p. 80). Conceptual knowledge is conscious and explicit. Eraut argued that conceptual knowledge learned in formal programs is under more critical control, whereas conceptual knowledge learned from experience is under less critical control. The issue of critical control is central to control knowledge. Control knowledge includes self-awareness, knowledge about learning how to learn, and the ability to reflect and self-evaluate. "Control knowledge is taken here to mean metaknowledge, that is, knowledge about knowledge and its use, which guides one's thinking and one's learning" (p. 95). Control knowledge will be important in the examination of models of professional learning and expertise, especially reflective practice.

Eraut (1994) argued that the development of professional knowledge requires the ability to learn from experience and learn propositional knowledge. Eraut articulates six areas of knowledge as the base for headteachers or principals. Two other groups have articulated areas of competence of the principalship. The National Commission on the Principalship identified 21 performance domains for principals, including leadership skills, interpersonal competence, and knowledge of educational programs. The commission also developed recommendations for principal preparation and a national certification process (ERS, 2000). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) developed six standards for principals. Each standard is explicated by a set of knowledge, dispositions, and performances to meet the standard (Shipman & Murphy, 2000).

Eraut's six areas of experiential knowledge are inclusive of knowledge learned through formal programs and knowledge learned through experience. A brief look at the two bodies of professional knowledge shows a significant overlap and may create a map of the professional knowledge base for the profession. What the ISLLC calls knowledge under each of the six standards is comparable to what Eraut terms knowledge of educational practice and conceptual knowledge. What the ISLLC calls performances, Eraut describes as process knowledge. In order to successfully meet the performance standards, principals draw on the knowledge of people and situation knowledge. The ISLLC standards do not describe the richness of the intuition of the principal as described by Eraut. There are some dispositions in the ISLLC standards

that speak to control knowledge, but not to the extent Eraut described them. On the whole, the ISLLC description of professional knowledge is more descriptive and linear, whereas Eraut's description is richer in the professional intuitive judgment required to complete the performance indicators.

Bulach, Pickett, and Boothe (1998) call for the need to build interpersonal competence of principals. They indicated that one third of principals leave involuntarily, primarily for two reasons. Examples of the poor human relation skills that contribute to involuntary dismissal include being more task focused than people oriented, avoidance of difficult issues, lack of vision, poor community relations, and poor administrative skills. Poor interpersonal communications including the failure to listen and failure to give and receive feedback also contribute to involuntary dismissal. The authors argued that given the demand for principals, additional professional development to improve critical skills is called for.

Livneh and Livneh (1999) identified characteristics or predispositions which contribute to involvement in continuing professional education of teachers and administrators. Four factors were determined to contribute to participation: self-motivated learning, educational background, commitment to professional learning, and external motivation. The factors address whether the individual has the skills, predispositions, and value for learning to pursue their own learning. In the study, self-motivation had the greatest predictive effect on time spent in CPE. "This general factor strongly suggests that: (a) the possession of the necessary learning skills and

intellectual ability, and (b) having internal motivation to gain further knowledge, are significant contributors to participating in professional growth activities" (p. 101).

External motivation and educational level were also predictive of time in learning activities over the previous year. External motivation was described as the external influences that stimulate learning. "Participants who saw a discrepancy between where they currently were professionally and where they wanted to be, became involved in learning for a social outlet, became involved in learning when they faced a personal crisis, had a desire to advance on their job, and became involved in learning when they had specific goals, were also more likely to spend more time in learning activities over the past year" (Livneh & Livneh, 1999, pp. 99-100).

Next, the strategies for effective professional development are discussed. Professional development can be job-embedded learning. Multiple other studies report characteristics of effective professional development of school principals. Fortunately, the National Staff Development Council (2000) issued a report, Learning to Lead, Leading to Learn: Improving School Quality Through Principal Professional Development, which synthesizes much of the literature. "Effective staff development for administrators is long-term, planned, job-embedded; focuses on student achievement; supports reflective practice; and provides opportunities to work, discuss, and solve problems with peers" (p. 5). The report suggested ongoing study groups, site visits, and in-school coaching as key strategies for principal professional

development. Brown et al. (2001) also reported the effectiveness of coaching and case study analysis as effective in-service strategies for middle-level principals.

Lashway and Anderson (1997) cited the common laissez-faire approach to professional development of principals by school districts. Such approaches leave it to the individual principal to direct their own professional development. "Because professional growth needs have so often been ignored by schools, we have few well-defined or thoroughly tested models that can be consulted" (p. 96). They did suggest several promising practices. Using evaluation as a growth tool can work to encourage growth if the objectives are clear and the principal was involved in the goal-setting process. Further, activities that respect adult learning styles, including the analysis of experience through mutual inquiry, are promising professional development practices. Individual choice in areas for development as well as self-examination and reflection foster professional vitality.

District policies and norms influence principal participation in professional development activities. District support for professional development can be in financial support and release time. Lashway and Anderson (1997) found that principals in their first three years of the role are reluctant to leave their buildings. Hallinger and Greenblatt (1989) found that central offices tend to have low expectations for principals to participate, even if they provide support through time and money. A laissez-faire attitude toward principal involvement in professional development activities seemed to exist.

Networking with other principals is also a valued form of continuing professional education. Daresh (1986) surveyed 250 principals in a midwestern state on their perceptions of in-service education. The most frequent form of professional education occurred through workshops presented by professional organizations. Principals indicated that networking opportunities, which provide opportunities to share common concerns, problems, and solutions, were the most effective in the performance of daily responsibilities.

Principals' centers are effective providers of continuing professional education and create the conditions for principals to become "committed, lifelong learners, assume major responsibility for their learning, and encourage and support their own learning" (Barth, 2001, p. 149). The impact of participation in a principals' center activities includes an increased sense of professionalism and strengthened collegial relationships (Barth, 2001). Barth provided a conceptual model for the professional development of principals. The model includes reflecting thoughtfully on the work they do, analyzing that work, clarifying their thinking, and engaging in conversation to better understand their practice. Engagement in learning through this model is felt to improve practice. Barth argued that if principals become head learners, the schools they work in are likely to become more fruitful learning environments.

Hallinger and Greenblatt (1989) studied professionally active principals in programs offered by a principals' center whose purpose was to develop instructional leadership. A central assumption of the study was that principal participation is a

leadership behavior. Three domains influence leadership behavior: community context, personal beliefs, experiences, and institutional context. The study sought to understand how personal beliefs and experiences influence participation in professional development activities and how district policies and norms influence principal participation in professional development activities.

"The principals in this sample viewed commitment to continuous growth as an internal need to grow" (Hallinger & Greenblatt, 1989, p. 71). The principals cited long-term experience in professional development activities and the important role of mentors in pursuit of learning. "Beliefs and values about adult learning influence the principals' perceptions of their role as school leaders and the value they place upon professional development for themselves and their staffs" (Hallinger & Greenblatt, p. 72). They identified gender differences in preference for professional development activities. Women emphasize relationship building and informal networks, whereas men emphasize skill building and new programs.

Revisiting a system of professional education for principals is important before moving on to how principals learn best. The importance of providing principal candidates with theoretical knowledge as well as real-world experiences through field courses, simulation, and mentoring is well documented in the literature. Professional programs also should focus on collaboration, reflection on practice, and networking skills (Bezzina, 1994). The challenges of beginning principals and their educational needs including knowledge, skills, and socialization have also been documented.

Similar issues arise in continuing professional education where learning on the job is valued and reflection on practice is an important strategy for learning from experience.

How Principals Learn

Brown et al. (2001) described four components of how middle school principals learn best based on interviews of current principals and the literature on professional development. The methods that best support continuing professional development are identification of needs, reflection within context and sharing with colleagues, adequate support for systematic development, and use of adult learning strategies. Needs assessment, resource allocation, and competent facilitation are taken for granted propositions in CPE. This study was most interested in developing reflective practice. Principals want to reflect on their practice and attempt to change (Brown et al., 2001).

Conley (1999) also answered the question of how professionals learn in her study, "The Professional Development of School Principals." She indicated that professionals learn through reflective practice, experiential learning, and self-directed learning. "Reflecting in practice and reflecting on practice provide a framework to investigate the independent learning patterns of principals" (pp. 21-22). At this point, the review of literature will focus on principal learning through reflective practice.

Reflective Practice

The purpose of this section is two-fold. The first purpose is to examine the role of reflection in daily practice as a method of professional development for school principals. The second is to describe the nature of critical reflection as practiced by school principals.

The idea of learning from experience through reflective practice is well documented in education. Substantial literature exists on reflective practice in preservice teacher education, development of beginning teachers, and professional development of experienced teachers (Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990; Schon, 1987). However, limited research exists for the use of reflective practice in the preservice education and the continuing professional education of principals. Osterman (1998) is a notable exception. To begin, the concept of reflective practice as described by Schon (1983, 1987) will be summarized.

Schon (1983) developed his theory of professional practice in response to the dominant epistemology of technical rationality, the changing face of the professions, and the new demands of professional practice. Technical rationality limits the professional knowledge to a specific, empirically based bounded set. "We are in need of inquiry into the epistemology of practice" (p. viii). Reflective practice is an attempt to capture the knowledge and competence of professional practice and the ability of professionals to meet the uncertain situations of practice.

The model of reflective practice is comprised of three constructs: knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. According to Schon (1983) knowing-in-action is "the characteristic mode of ordinary practical knowledge" (p. 54). "Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action, and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action" (p. 49). The commonness and directness of Schon's language reinforces the day-to-day nature of the knowing to which he is speaking in the body of knowledge of professionals.

Reflection-in-action is the heart of Schon's (1983) model of professional expertise. Professionals draw on their intuitive knowledge and reflect while in action. However, not all professionals reflect while in action all of the time. When professional practice is moving forward in an expected manner, the practical knowledge of the professional dictates practices. Professionals develop a repertoire of practice in which they learn to pay attention to factors and develop sets of responses to typical situations. Professionals develop automaticity of tacit knowledge. In cases of surprise or when the practitioner's intuitive sense is challenged, reflection-in-action is stimulated. "Stimulated by surprise, they turn thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action" (p. 50). Reflection-in-action is on the intuitive knowing of the professional, the actions of practice and the outcomes of practice. When the outcomes are unusual or undesirable, reflection-in-action may be prompted. "It is the entire process of

reflection-in-action which is central to the 'art' by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (p. 50).

Schon (1987) identified three key distinctions of reflection-in-action. First, the reflection is conscious. Second, reflection-in-action critically questions the assumptions underlying knowledge-in-action. Third, reflection-in-action fosters experimentation. "What distinguishes reflection-in-action from other kinds of reflection is its immediate significance for action" (p. 29).

Reflection-on-action is the act of looking back on past practice and making sense of the action after the fact. Reflection-on-action can be described as learning from experience in a deliberative manner. "We may reflect *on* action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome" (Schon, 1987, p. 26). Reflection-on-action helps make explicit the understandings that shaped practice (Schon, 1983, p. 61).

Eraut (1994) provided a critique of Schon's construction of reflection-in-action. The critique centers on the time continuum, the artificial circumstances used to illustrate reflection-in-action, and lack of clarity about the meaning of reflection. Eraut claimed that Schon did not accurately differentiate between the impact of the passing of time and the impact on reflection. When time is short, Eraut argued that refection-in-action is a metacognitive process. When the time period extends, reflection may no longer be in action. "Extending the time period even further is likely to result in reflection assuming a more deliberative character" (p. 145). Eraut

argued that Schon's theory is really a theory of metacognition by making the distinction of deliberative reflection and thinking about the deliberative reflection. The critique also raised the question at what point does reflection-in-action become reflection-on-action.

Few studies specifically examine reflective practice for school principals. Barth (2001) and Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) provided the most thoughtful ventures into the study of principals as reflective practitioners. The description of reflective practice for educators described by Osterman and Kottkamp has explicit roots in Argyris and Schon's (1974) theories of action. "In the reflective practice concept, observable behavior--the decisions we make, the actions we take, the way we act--is governed by personal action theories" (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 8). The theories are the beliefs and assumptions that shape practice. Argyris and Schon describe theories of action as follows:

> When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory in use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories. (pp. 6-7)

Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) used the conceptual framework of theories of action to explain behavior stability and change in professional practice. Espoused theories are conscious to the practitioner; however, they do not always guide the actions of the practitioner. Theories-in-use actually guide behaviors because they are

the assumptions and beliefs which underlie practice. The assumptions and beliefs are deeply rooted, not always conscious, and resistant to change because of the acculturation process of educators (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). In order for professional practice to change, the practitioner must become aware of the underlying assumptions, reflect on them, and develop new assumptions about practice. Discrepancies between espoused theories and theories-in-use as well as discrepancies of actions and intended outcome may foster awareness for the need for change. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) reported the results of two previously presented studies that examine the theories of action conceptual framework.

Both studies attempted to assist practitioners in learning from experience by gathering information about their experiences, about espoused theories, and about theories in use. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) studied the efforts to develop reflective practice in potential principals through a course in a principal preparation program. The purpose of the course was to capture espoused theories and to compare them to observable behavior. The central aspect of the course was the development of a platform that reflects the individual's beliefs, values, and goals about administration, learning, supervision, etc. The platform enabled a conscious process of reflection and the identification of inconsistencies in the behavior. Information about behaviors or evidence of theories-in-use was gathered through a variety of means. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) utilized direct observation methods such as shadowing and video and audio taping to document observations. Course participants

also engaged in role-play as a simulation of practice. Participants also developed narratives such as journals and case records as means to gather observations of behavior. Participants reported an increased general reflectivity, introspection, and enhanced self-understanding. Reflection became a guide to action for a number of participants.

Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) studied a small group of New York City principals during a semester-long program to improve school leadership.

> The intent was to provide an experience that would enable these principals (a) to identify and assess the theories-in-use that shape their administrative behavior, (b) to develop a new conceptual framework for leadership, and (c) to begin to integrate these new ideas and behaviors into their professional practice prior to their return to the principalship. (p. 117)

The renewal experience loosely followed Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning as the principals explored their underlying assumptions about leadership and control and developed new leadership behaviors. The participants used role-plays and case records as observation and analysis tools to examine their experiences, many of which were troubling. The participants engaged in conscious problem finding through collaborative processes. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) reported that the principals developed self-awareness, self-confidence, and new leadership skills consistent with a more democratic style. In both studies, participants were able to consciously self-monitor behaviors and assumptions.

Barth (2001) took a practical approach to reflection and provided a number of strategies for principals to reflect in practice and on practice including observation,

writing, conversation, and embracing differences. By observation, Barth suggested that principals and other school professionals see the school in a new way. Writing is a strategy for reflection both in and on practice. Writing quick notes while in action or writing more deliberative pieces outside of practice provide opportunities to "develop meaning-making lenses through which to observe and write about practice" (p. 68). Conversations with critical friends can facilitate reflection. "Conversations have the capacity to promote reflection, to create and exchange knowledge, and to help improve the organization" (p. 68). Diversity fuels reflection because it prompts conversation, comparison, and observation. "Personal reflection on our experience is *how* we learn from experience. Reflection contributes to the refinement of subsequent action and to the building of a repertoire of professional craft knowledge" (p. 74).

Reflective practice provides opportunities for principals to engage in professional development activities on a regular, systematic basis. "CPE can no longer be seen as educators leaving their buildings to attend short workshops or graduate courses. It must evolve to include opportunities for educators to: (a) reflect on their practice and solve problems of practice collaboratively" (Livneh & Livneh, 1999, p. 92). Sadly, the research base for the development of reflective practice is neither broad nor deep. For example in the book, If I Only Knew: Success Strategies for Navigating the Principalship (Alvy & Robbins, 1998), not a single mention is made of reflective practice, including the chapter on lifelong learning. Likewise, in a

recent issue of the *NASSP Bulletin* (Flanary, 2000) dedicated to the professional development of principals, only one mention of reflective practice is made in the whole volume, and the sources cited have been included in the preceding review. Further research is necessary to support principals with the changing role, changing learning needs of students and staff, and changing schools.

Schon distinguished between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Both abilities are essential for principals. The ability to reflect on action is more consistent with the continuing professional education needs of principals. Reflection-in-action is more aligned with professional expertise. Schon (1987) asserted that reflection-in-action is central to professional expertise.

Critical Reflection

This section describes the nature of critical reflection as practiced by school principals. The need and benefits of participation in collegial discourse and inquiry are well documented in theory. Adult learning theory provides a framework for understanding collegial discourse. According to Mezirow (1998), assumptions frame the interpretation of experience. Critical self-reflection is the questioning process of the validity of the assumptions. "Critical self-reflection on assumptions involves a critique of the premises upon which the learner has defined a problem" (p. 2). Critical self-reflection best occurs through discourse.

Limited empirical research exists on the role of critical self-reflection on the instructional practice of educators. The goal of this section is to share a brief

theoretical framework of critical self-reflection and the few studies that report the results of analysis of transformative learning in educational settings.

Mezirow (1990) articulated a theory of adult learning based on a constructivist framework that posits that adult learners have assumptions, beliefs, and values that determine the way they interpret the world and their experiences. The role of the adult learner is to make sense of their experiences. "Transformative learning theory leads us to view learning as a process of becoming aware of one's assumptions and revising these assumptions based on critical reflection" (Cranton, 1994a, p. 730). Critical self-reflection is the process by which the learner questions the validity of their assumptions.

Cranton (1994a) provided an analysis of instructional development of college faculty through transformative learning theory. She indicated that "faculty have meaning perspectives on teaching: psychological perspectives on themselves as teacher; socio-linguistic perspectives based on institutional and social norms; and epistemic perspectives based on their knowledge of teaching" (p. 733). The analysis raised questions on whether the assumptions are explicit and whether faculty members reflect on their assumptions. According to the theory of transformative learning, to change teaching practice, teachers must make basic assumptions explicit, reflect on the assumptions, and perhaps revise and act on the revisions (Cranton, 1994a).

Sokol and Cranton (1998) provided a case study using an in-depth observation methodology of 16 adult educators engaged in a three-week course. The purpose of the study was to examine the way the educators engaged in critical reflection of their teaching practice. Some of the participants revised their assumptions about the role of students, and another participant revised her fundamental view of teaching as a profession. Sokol and Cranton (1998) conclude that transformation is "the key to meaningful professional development for adult educators" (p. 3).

Taylor (2000) reported the results of two studies of transformation learning theory within educational contexts. Saavedra (1995) studied teacher transformation through study groups. Through critical reflection and discourse, teachers revised their meaning schemes about teaching. Vogelsang (1993) studied the types of educational activities that promote perspective transformation in 20 undergraduate women through interviews. The differences in learning were based on the types of reflection the students employed. The students who reflected on context and process had different learning experiences than those students who reflected on content, process, and premises. Based on his review of the literature, Taylor (2000) concluded that critical reflection leads to the most significant learning experiences in adulthood when it reassesses the way problems are raised and addressed.

The preceding review of four studies suggests implications for the study of principals in critical reflection. One area for study is the nature of the assumptions principals hold. Some possible meaning perspectives to examine in principals are

their beliefs about the role of schools in society, the relationship of the local school to the community, beliefs about themselves as principals, perspectives on supervision and development of faculty, and the knowledge they have about their practice.

A second potential area for study is critical reflection as an effective professional development practice. In order to study critical reflection as a professional development practice, attention needs to be paid to the second frame, the process of reflection. The process of critical reflection should include when assumptions are made explicit, if the principal reflected on the assumptions, whether the assumptions changed through the process of reflection, and if practice changed as a result. The analysis will test the model of critical reflection and whether a transformation of meaning perspectives occurred.

An additional inquiry into critical reflection as a professional development process for principals is the kinds of reflection in which the principals engage. As in the study by Vogelsang (1993), an examination of the types of reflection including content, context, process, and premises could be completed.

Gerhels (1984) identified four phases of the principal's transformational learning. The phases integrate the principal's perspectives (vision, values, and beliefs) of the role with the perspectives of self. The model combines action and reflection as the principal learns from experience on the job. The first phase is the recognition of the dialectic of the role and the person. The second phase is acceptance of the issues inherent in the dialectic. The third phase is the

transformation of existing perspectives into new definitions of self and the role (Gerhels, 1984, p. 67). The final phase is the integration of the needs of self and the expectations of the role into a harmonious whole through a balancing process.

Future studies could seek to understand the experiences of the principals in each content, context, and process and to represent the relationships of the frames. What is the nature of the critical reflection practices of principals? Do certain trigger events followed by critical reflection lead to transformative learning and the approach to the role? Networking and coaching are effective methods of principal professional development. A deeper examination of collegial discourse as practiced by principals would be beneficial to the field.

Like theories-of-action, "critical self-reflection is stimulated by perceived discrepancies between learners' beliefs, values, or assumptions and new knowledge, understanding, information, or insights" (Cranton, 1994b, p. 188). Stimulating critical self-reflection can be accomplished through many of the articulated strategies. Increased self-awareness can be developed with action theories such as role-plays, narratives, and learning cycles. Reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and theories of action are distinct from critical self-reflection. Content reflection has the most similarity to reflective practice in that both seek to understand knowledge and beliefs. Process and premise reflection are where the distinction rests. Process reflection takes content reflection deeper and considers how the individual came to know, understand, or believe (Cranton, 1994b). Premise reflection addresses why the

belief, assumption, or knowledge is important (Cranton, 1994b). Premise reflection can be an important professional growth process for principals.

Models for Principal Professional Learning

Learning from experience is important to principals. In the continuum of continuing professional education, ongoing professional learning is essential to meet the demands of the changing role in changing schools and society. Reflective practice including critical reflection is a viable theory of developing professional learning for principals. Osterman (1998) and Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) have illustrated the role of reflective practice in the preparation of administrators. These authors demonstrated that reflective practice through the examination of theories of action could renew principals and develop new leadership skills. Gerhels (1984) developed a framework of transformative learning as principals integrate personal meaning perspectives and perspectives of the role. Still, little evidence documents broad application of reflective practice as a means of learning from experience in principals. Eraut's (1994) commentary on professional learning is fitting to the continuing professional education of principals:

> Apart from the limited though valuable literature on professional socialization, we know very little about what is learned during the period of initial qualification besides the content of formal examinations. Still less is known about subsequent learning, how and why professionals learn to apply, disregard or modify their initial training immediately after qualification; and to what extent continuing on-the-job or even off-the-job learning contributes to their professional maturation, updating, promotion or reorientation. (p. 40)

It is important to consider theories of expertise. Theories of expertise extend the review on professional preparation, professional induction and socialization, and continuing professional education. The continued learning of professional knowledge is required for competent performance. What moves a professional beyond competent performance to expert performance?

> An expert is distinguished from less competent practitioners by the use of an intuitive thought process, which transcends analytical thought to dialectically interact with a situation. Experts blend procedural knowledge with more abstract declarative knowledge to spontaneously generate solutions to problematic situations in action. (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998, p. 100)

Models of professional learning and the development of expertise can be illustrative of the issues for principals. One of the central characteristics of each of the models is the role of reflective practice. Schon's (1983) model of professional practice is described in and of itself as a theory of expertise. Other theorists have included reflective practice as a component of their model of how professionals learn. First, several models of professional expertise that hold reflective practice as a key component will be reviewed.

Collins (1991) offered a critical review of the professionalization of adult education. He argued against the effect of technical rationality, as did Schon (1983). Collins argued that the reliance on technique undermines the role of adult educators to build "on the learner's past experience and maintain the integrity of voluntary participation" (p. 6). In the place of a reductionistic professionalization, Collins called for adult education to be viewed as a vocation. The role of adult education is to

facilitate the "acquisition of competence through thoughtful discourse and reflective action with others" (p. 40). He argued that adult educators must be continually engaged in "self-conscious reflection." Competent performance involves reflecting critically on practical problems in context of practice.

Cervero (1988) described a model of how professionals learn and acquire expertise. "This model is rooted in what they believe about how professionals know, how professionals incorporate knowledge into practice, under what conditions professionals learn best, and what role prior experience plays in learning" (p. 38). The model had three central components: cognitive psychology, reflective practice, and theories of expertise. According to Cervero, "Theories and research from cognitive psychology provide a basic understanding of how professionals develop expertise by describing how the mind works" (p. 39). He explicated cognitive psychology by describing theories of cognitive structures. Cervero used Schon's model of reflective practice as a component of the model. The third component of the model was a theory of expertise. Cervero described theories of expertise in three professions. The theories of expertise in teaching may be a useful area for further study to examine the implications for a theory of expertise in education administration.

Daley (2000, 2001) updated and expanded Cervero's model. "We need to further develop an understanding of how knowledge is constructed, how it is linked with professional practice, and how the context affects the process" (Daley, 2000, p.

35). Daley (2000) described how knowledge is constructed in the context of practice building on constructivist learning theory, situated cognition, and transformative learning. These three perspectives on learning can account for how professionals acquire and use knowledge, the social nature of learning, the influence of context on learning, and critical reflection on previous understanding.

Daley (2001) applied the model to four different professional groups to understand how knowledge becomes meaningful in professional practice. The model attempted to develop "a comprehensive, holistic assessment of the interrelationships between the learner, the knowledge generated within the educational program, the elements of professional practice, and the context of organizations in which professionals are employed" (p. 40). She found that the nature of the professional work and client interactions make knowledge meaningful in professional practice. She found that each of the four professions had a unique view of their work which influences meaning making and learning. Meaning was constructed when knowledge was linked to practice.

Mott (1996, 2000) argued that practitioners build their own action theories and develop personal expert knowledge for practice. According to Mott, skill acquisition and cognitive psychology have a role in the development of professional expertise. Mott reinforced the role of mental schemas or the role of cognitive psychology on professional learning, as did Daley and Cervero. She added the model of skill acquisition as developed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) that argued that practitioners

develop skills, learn from experience, and move along a continuum of novice to advanced beginner to competent, to proficient, and to expert performance.

Mott (1996) proposed reflective theory building as a model of developing professional expertise. Professionals create expert knowledge for use in practice through reflective theory building. "The reflective practitioner consciously reflects on the challenges of practice, reiteratively engages in problem posing, data gathering, action, evaluation, and reflection, and then shares the knowledge produced with others in practice" (p. 61).

Mott (2000) concluded by identifying the themes for continuing professional education for the development of professional expertise. Continuing professional education should be responsive to the changing context of professional practice, include authentic self-assessment, be situated in practice, foster collaborative interaction of professionals, and foster competent future performance. These themes have been illustrated in the preceding work.

Based on the preceding review of the literature, this study proposes a model of the development of expertise for school principals (see Figure 1). The upper portion of the model depicts the isolated components for principal preparation, induction, and professional education. The model depicts the potential isolation of these three

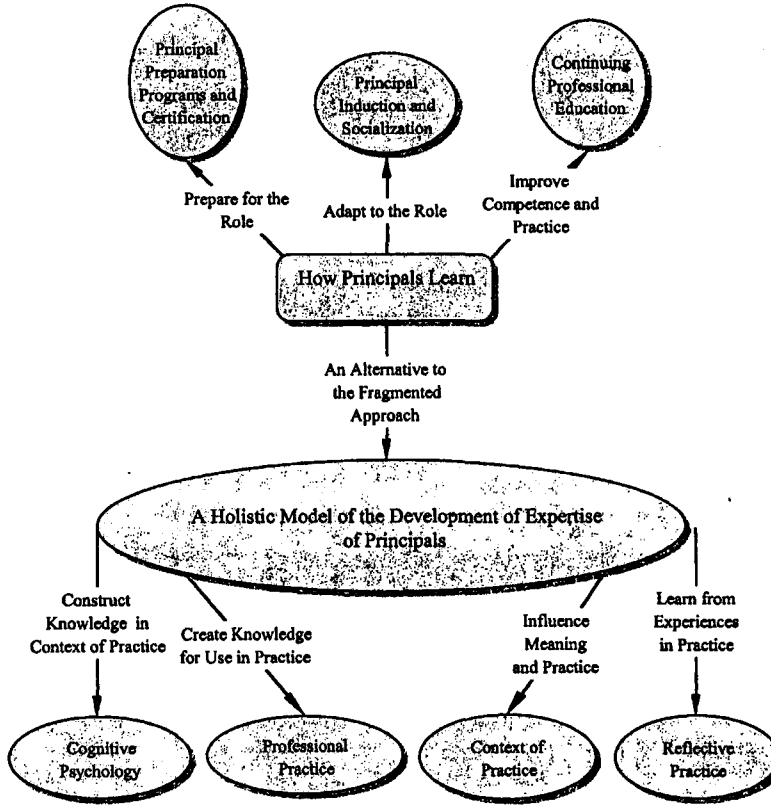

Figure 1. Map of the Literature on How Principals Learn.

components and the lack of continuity in the development of principals over a career. The bottom portion of the model is in addition to the existing continuum of professional education for the profession.

The bottom portion of the model attempts to depict an alternative to the potentially fragmented approach. A more holistic model of the development of expertise includes a number of components that are not dependent upon time. Essential components of the model are cognitive psychology, including situated cognition, transformative learning, and constructivist learning. Reflective practice is central to the model. The model illustrates processes to create and use knowledge in practice, the influence of context on the development of meaning, and the role of reflective practice in learning from experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study was a close examination of the phenomena of how current school principals learn by reflecting on experiences on the job. Eraut (1994) documented the power of learning from experiences situated in practice as a pathway to the development of professional knowledge, competence, and expertise. Continuing professional education for school principals must include the reflection on practice and collaborative problem solving (Livneh & Livneh, 1999).

The broad purpose of the study was to examine how principals develop knowledge and skills through reflective practice which enables them to become more proficient in the role. Continuing professional education enables principals to acquire expertise. The use of reflective strategies as a way to learn from experience is central to a theory of expertise. This study was designed to describe the use of reflective strategies by principals and how these strategies shape understanding, inform practice, and monitor practice. This chapter describes the methodology of the study, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

The goal of this study was to describe the nature of reflective practice methods as engaged by principals and how principals incorporate learning into practice. The research questions are broadly understood as an attempt to capture how new meaning

and beliefs are constructed and how practice is changed as a result of the new meaning and beliefs.

1. How do principals question themselves in practice?
2. What are the different processes of reflection used by principals?
3. What strategies do principals use to develop an evolving level of competence?
4. How do principals learn from experience?
5. How do principals monitor their understanding, practice, and the development of competence?
6. How do principals integrate new understandings into practice?
7. How do principals reframe their understandings based on experiences?

Phenomenological Research Method

The research methods for this study are grounded in phenomenology. "Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the way things present themselves to us in and through such experiences" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2). Phenomenology seeks the understanding of the identity or essence of a phenomenon. The essence of the phenomenon transcends the multiple ways in which the phenomenon is experienced. In phenomenology, consciousness and experience are intentional relationships a person has to an object, whether that object is a physical manifestation, a remembrance, or an imagination (Sokolowski, 2000). Further, the

mind does not exist only to itself; the mind co-exists with the world. Therefore, "the mind is a public thing, that it acts and manifests itself out in the open, not just inside its own confines. Everything is outside" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 12).

Intentionality is a core concept in the philosophy of phenomenology. Sokolowski (2000) described three structural forms in phenomenological analysis: parts and wholes, identity in manifold, and presence and absence. Intentionality is central to each structure. "Whenever we wish to explore a phenomenological issue, we should ask what are the parts and wholes, the identities in manifolds, and the blends of absences and presences that are at work in the issue in question" (p. 40). The research methodology sought to ask these questions.

The use of phenomenological research methods in this study was intended to focus on the meaning of lived experience of school principals as they use reflective strategies to further professional learning and solve problems. The results provide a rich description of how school principals learn from experiences situated in practice through reflection. The descriptions were based upon the essential themes that constitute the phenomena (Tesch, 1990).

> Psychological research based on the phenomenological philosophy uses a different approach to the study of consciousness than is used in mainstream psychological research; epistemological principles attuned to the special characteristics of human experience are applied. The aim of the phenomenological informed research is to produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experience. (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 44)

Phenomenological research methods are an attempt to "study the world as it appears to us in and through consciousness" (Tesch, 1990, p. 48). Tesch continued to describe phenomenological research methods as a way to discern themes, both the commonalties and uniqueness, of meaning of experiences. An overview of the research methods included the researcher exploring his own experience of the phenomena, collecting intensive descriptions of the phenomena from others, identifying themes in the data, finding the commonalties and uniqueness in the themes, crystallizing the phenomena, and providing a general description of the phenomena.

Participant Selection

The selection of participants in a phenomenological study is based on the identification of those individuals who can provide a rich description of the topic. Polkinghorne (1989) indicated that the purpose of participant selection is to "generate a full range of variation in the set of descriptions to be used in analyzing a phenomena" [phenomenon] (p. 48). He described two requirements for selection. First, the participant must have had experience with the topic, and second, the participant must be able to provide a full description of the topic.

All participants in the study were selected from a large, local suburban school district. The researcher initially received permission to conduct the study from the superintendent. She facilitated the opportunity to provide an overview of the study

and to formally request participation in the study. A written request for participation followed the presentation. All 17 of the principals in the district were invited to participate. Fifteen of the principals participated in the study.

Participants in this study were drawn from the whole range of experiences and proficiency in an effort to discern patterns of the reflective processes. The selected participants were comfortable commenting on their professional practice and thinking and how reflection has contributed to their practice and learning. Berliner (1988) provided an overview of the development of expertise in teaching along a continuum. Both the novice and the advanced beginner are working to build knowledge and skills. The novice and the advanced beginner are "labeling and describing events, following rules, recognizing and classifying contexts" (Berliner, 1988, pp. 3-4). Competent and proficient professionals tend to be more analytical about their performance. Berliner (1988) argued that proper goals for advanced beginners, competent, and proficient teachers are to "develop reflective practitioners, sensible decision makers, and proficient problems solvers" (p. 26). Further he stated, "Experts appear rather unreflective as long as no problems are perceived" because experts process less information than they encounter, and focus on the atypical" (p. 16). The expert has developed a different way of seeing experiences.

According to Polkinghorne (1989), "The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the structure of an experience, not to describe the characteristics of a group who have had the experience" (p. 48). A broad-enough

group of participants is required to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. Polkinghorne cites considerable variation in the number of subjects in phenomenological study from 3 to 325 participants.

Data Collection

The heart of data collection in a phenomenological study is the interview. Seidman (1991) indicated that "the purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to 'evaluate' as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). The literature described the use of long interviews (Polkinghorne, 1989), nondirective interviews (Tesch, 1990), and open-ended questions (Seidman, 1991).

Polkinghorne (1989) described the elements of a phenomenological interview. As already stated, the focus of the interview is on the experience, in this case the experience of reflective practice, for the purpose of describing and understanding the meaning of reflective practice for the participants. The interviews sought detailed, precise, and specific accounts of the experiences without interpretation. The purpose of such interviews was to allow the essence of reflective practice to emerge.

Seidman (1991) provided a description of a three-interview method. The purpose of the first interview was to put the participant's experience in a context of the life history. The contention was that in order to understand a person's experience

of a phenomenon, the researcher must understand the context in which the phenomenon occurs. The second interview focused on the details of the experience. The third interview asked the participant to reflect on the meaning of the experience.

Each participant was interviewed by the researcher. The focus of the interview was to gather detailed examples of when the principal engages in reflective practice. The researcher conducted nondirective, open-ended interviews. Polkinghorne (1989) indicated that researchers "need reports of the experience as it actually appears in a person's consciousness . . . thus the production of phenomenological protocols requires that the subjects' awareness be redirected toward their own experiencing" (p. 46).

A portion of the interview was dedicated to gathering demographic information. A second aspect of the interview was to gather data on the nature of reflection engaged in by the participant. Schon (1983) described two kinds of reflection. Reflection-in action-occurs when the professional's intuitive sense is challenged. The professional engages in conscious reflection and critically questions the assumptions underlying the knowledge in action. Schon described reflection-on-action as learning from experience in a deliberative manner by looking back and making sense of experiences. The interview was intended to gather participant experiences on both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action in a further effort to discern how the participants monitor their practice and understanding.

Critical incidents were used as a way to explore how an incident fostered learning and reflection. Preskill (1996) found that the use of critical incidents had implications on practice. She found that critical incidents could foster understanding and awareness about assumptions and beliefs. Further, Preskill found that critical incidents provide an opportunity for individuals to consider their own learning processes and to question their own learning.

The participants were asked to describe a critical incident and what they learned from it in the interview. Critical reflection on a critical incident that challenged existing knowledge structures was a fruitful way to gather data. "The critical incidents approach helps people to be aware of the assumptions framing their practice through an analysis of their direct experience. More particularly, it focuses on the identification and analysis of events in people's lives that are remembered for their emotional significance" (Brookfield, 1992, p. 17). Brookfield (1987) provided sets of instructions for participation in critical incident exercises. An interview question can be adapted from this set of instructions:

> Think back over the last six months and identify an incident at work that you remember as causing you the greatest discomfort, pressure, or difficulty. Write down, in no more than a half page, a brief description of the incident. Make sure you give the following details about the incident: (1) when and where it occurred, (2) who was involved (roles and job titles rather than personal identities may be given here), and (3) what it was about the incident that was so significant as to cause a problem. (p. 97)

The purpose of the critical incident statement was to elicit the participant's assumptions and the process of reflection. Critical incident analysis forces reflection

on action. Coombs (2001) used critical incidents to study both retrospective and anticipatory reflection. The critical incident analysis was used to gather data about the experiences of critical reflection of each participant. Specifically, the researcher was listening for experiences in relation to whether initial assumptions were explicit or surfaced, if the participant reflected on the assumptions, whether assumptions were then modified, and whether or not practice changed as a result of the process. This methodology may surface whether or not the individual has reframed the problem as evidence of double-loop learning and therefore altered knowledge structures.

The participants were asked through the interviews to describe in examples of their experiences with reflective practice in detail. The interviews were open-ended and unstructured and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were face to face. Each of the interviews was tape-recorded with the consent of the participant. The interview data were converted to transcription for the purpose of analysis. The participants were encouraged to share the details of their experiences. The interview questions are in Appendix B.

The 15 principals who participated in this study were from diverse groups. Table 1 depicts the paraticipant's age, gender, number of years in education, and the number of years as a principal. The ages of the interview participants ranged from 33 to 54 years old. The average age of the participants was 41.6 years old. Nine of the 15 participants were between the ages of 33 and 40 years old. Nine females and six males participated in the study. The majority of the participants were Caucasian.

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Years in Education	Years as Principal
Matthew	33	male	10	3
Ryan	39	male	14	4
Emma	36	female	13	7
Michael	33	male	9	1
Isabella	52	female	22	unknown
Olivia	36	female	10	4
Lauren	33	female	11	4
Madison	40	female	18	2
Nicholas	35	male	10	6
Andrew	38	male	15	1
Sophia	54	female	30	11
Sarah	45	female	24	13
Samantha	49	female	28	2
Abigail	48	female	27	7
Jacob	unknown	male	31	14

Two participants were African American, one participant was Hispanic, and one participant was Asian American.

The years of experience of the participants ranged from 9 years to 31 years. The average number of years of experience in education was 18.1. Six of the participants had more than 20 years of experience in education. The years of service as a principal ranged from 1 year of experience to 14 years of experience. Two of the participants were in their first year as a principal. Eight of the participants had been principals for less than five years. The average length of service as a principal of the participants was 5.26 years. Three principals had more than 10 years of experience in the role.

All 17 principals in the district were invited and encouraged to participate in the study. Fifteen principals chose to participate. All 12 of the elementary school principals participated. Two of the middle school principals and the principal of the special education and assessment school participated.

The principals in this study were all certified to teach in public schools. Participants' teaching certifications varied across elementary, secondary, and special education certification. Four of the participants had taught special education. Seven of the participants had taught elementary school. Four of the participants had taught at the middle school, and one participant had taught at the high school level.

All of the participants had administrative certification. Four of the participants earned their administrative certification through a cohort program

between the school district and a local university. Three participants indicated that they had achieved additional administrative certification, including one doctoral degree.

Nine of the participants had previous experiences as either deans or assistant principals. Four participants had between one and three years of experience as deans in either a middle school or high school. Seven of the participants had between one and three years of experience as assistant principals at either an elementary or middle school. Two of the participants had both experiences as a dean and as an assistant principal.

Three of the participants had previous experiences as principals. One of the three had been a principal for three years in one of the district's elementary schools, had five years of experience at another of the district's elementary schools, and was in the sixth year at the current building. The second experienced principal had seven years of experience at a middle school. The third experienced principal had nine years of experience at another elementary school in the district. Three of the participants had experience other than that of teacher, dean, assistant principal, or principal.

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis in a phenomenological study is to discern themes in the descriptions of experiences. Polkinghorne (1989) described three components of the "phenomenological investigation of consciousness": (1) gather descriptions for individuals who have had the experience, (2) analyze the descriptions for the common elements, and (3) write an accurate description of the experience.

The philosophy of phenomenology calls for the adoption of the phenomenological attitude. The attitude or viewpoint enables the philosopher to disengage from the world belief system, restrict intentionality to the phenomena, and therefore become better able to see and provide a description of the identity of the object (Sokolowski, 2000). "This means that while we are in the phenomenological attitude, we suspend all the intentionalities that we are examining. We neutralize them. We do not change our intentionalities, we keep them as they are, but we contemplate them" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 48). The adoption of the phenomenological attitude is called "phenomenological reduction or the *epoche*" (p. 48). Sokolowski indicated that the *epoche* is the restraint from judgment until the evidence is clear.

Bracketing enables the philosopher to consider the phenomena precisely as it is (Sokolowski, 2000). According to Polkinghorne (1989), "The eidetic (essence) epoche (abstention) is a bracketing of interest in the particular and specific instances of an experience in order to grasp its structural principles" (p. 51).

Polkinghorne (1989) provided a set of common steps in data analysis. The steps include dividing the descriptions into meaning units, the conceptualization of the meaning units, and a synthesized general description. Tesch (1990) indicated that a meaning unit is "a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information" (p. 116). Tesch provided direction on establishing an organizing system for the meaning units. The organization comes from the data itself for a descriptive/interpretation study, rather than a theoretical framework. The organization emerges from reading the text and looking for patterns by the identification of the topic, not the content. Looking for patterns is the beginning of the coding process. "After data are coded, they are still not ready for interpretation. Everything that belongs in one category must be assembled in one place, so the researcher can read in continuous fashion about [the phenomena]" (p. 122).

Polkinghorne (1989) provided three examples of analysis procedures. A generalized set of steps in the analysis of data included:

1. Classification of meaning units, as described above.

2. Reduction in which the meaning units are "transformed into the words of the researcher" into more precise descriptive terms (p. 53).

3. Establishment of the theme clusters that are common to all subjects.

Polkinghorne further described this process as synthesis: "Synthesis involves tying together and integrating a list of transformed meaning units into a consistent and

systematic general description of the psychological structure of the experience under investigation" (p. 56). The process requires seeing the whole and "looking for the structure underlying the variations in the meanings" (p. 56).

4. Identification of the theme clusters as hypothetical identification and description of experience.

5. Application of the description to selected protocols to test for sufficiency. Another possibility is to ask participants to review the description and compare to personal experiences.

Data analysis occurred by the classification of interview comments into meaning units. Each transcript was read and reread. Identified segments of the transcripts were classified as meaning units with a code word. The code words were analyzed to reduce the meaning units to establish theme clusters. The theme units were then connected to the research questions as a description of experience. The analysis of the data occurred in the reading, coding, and clustering of the expressions. The stories and words of the participants were powerful and meaningful. The data analysis was presented so that the experiences of the participants were paramount.

The descriptions were tested for sufficiency. At the conclusion of the transcription process, each transcript was sent to the participant for review. After the initial phases of the data analysis process, the initial theme clusters were presented to the participants and others in a formal administrative retreat. At the conclusion of the presentation, the researcher asked the participants whether the presented themes

captured their experiences. In addition, a formal letter along with the themes was mailed to each participant requesting feedback on the descriptions of the experiences.

Trustworthiness of the Data

In a phenomenological study, the role of the researcher has an impact on the outcomes of the study. The researcher resides in the boundaries of the school district and has a child who attends one of the schools involved in the study. Further, the researcher attended schools within the district from kindergarten through high school. The researcher is currently a high school principal of a special-purpose, state school. The school is located within the boundaries of the participating school district but does not have any governing ties to the local district.

As a principal, the researcher operates professionally from a base of beliefs about what it means to be a principal. As an adult educator and school principal, the researcher has a set of beliefs about effective professional learning, school leadership and management, and the needs of students, parents, and teachers. Principals all do certain things as leaders and learners. As such, the researcher adopts a position as a participant-observer. The experiences of the researcher as special-purpose high school principal are somewhat distant from the experiences of public elementary and middle school principals. First, no high school principals were involved in this study; all of the participants are school leaders in different school settings. Second, once the interviews started, it was easy to focus on the experiences of the participant. There

were few incidents in which the researcher had direct experiences in the specific examples of issues discussed.

Several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. First, the transcription process was thoroughly reviewed by the researcher. The researcher read the transcripts while listening to the audiotape. Second, the transcripts of each interview were mailed to each participant. Each participant was asked to read through the transcription for accuracy and to return any corrections.

Additional steps were taken to examine the codes and the themes. After the initial analysis of the data and establishing of the themes, the researcher shared the themes with the participating school district as a part of the leadership retreat. The results of the analysis were presented to all of the administrators in the district including each of the participating principals, central office administrators, deans, assistant principals, and board members. The presentation included slides of the content, verbal commentary, and handouts. At that presentation, the researcher requested feedback on the themes. The researcher mailed a follow-up letter including the initial analysis of the themes to each of the participants and asked for feedback. The feedback from the principals indicated that the themes were accurate.

Further, the data analysis chapter was reviewed by a college professor and researcher. The colleague has a doctorate in educational psychology and experience as an educational researcher. The codes and the narrative of the analysis were shared,

read, and discussed. The colleague provided invaluable feedback and spoke to the veracity of the analysis.

Finally, the researcher met throughout the process with his dissertation director and the dissertation committee. The dissertation director provided feedback and guidance at critical stages in the process.

Chapter 4 of this study addresses the results of the data analysis. After a close examination of the phenomena of reflective practice, the researcher will articulate insights toward building a theory or developing a model for professional practice. Tesch (1990) provided a mild caution:

> Although one could conclude that descriptive/interpretive analysis can be turned into theory-building analysis by simply adding another phase to the analysis process, such a conclusion would be misleading in most cases. In real life, many qualitative research projects do not clearly belong to one or another group. As a rule, however, a researcher who sets out to construct theoretical notions will think of her/his categories somewhat differently than the researcher who mostly wants to make use of categories as a temporary organizing device. (p. 114)

At the conclusion of the data collection and analysis, the researcher returned to the literature to address the potential implications of the findings of the study. The results of the study have implications on the fields of education administration, adult education, and human resource development.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study described the strategies of reflection and how reflection contributes to the evolution of competence in the role of principal. The descriptions also addressed the principals' perceptions of the monitoring of professional learning and practice.

The established theme clusters which organized the descriptions are the researcher's descriptive terms of the experiences. The established theme clusters are common to several but perhaps not all participants. The synthesis of the meaning units and initial coding into the themes and descriptions were the researcher's integration of the unifying experiences into a systematic description of the phenomena. The organization emerged from reading the text and looking for patterns. The researcher discerned the themes in the descriptions of experiences and did so for the experiences related to each of the research questions.

Research Questions

For the purpose of reporting the analysis, the research questions were reordered to align more clearly with the sequence in which the interview questions were posed in the interview.

The specific research questions pertaining to how current principals use reflective strategies to further their professional learning and problem solving were:

1. How do principals learn from experience?
2. What are the different processes of reflection used by principals?
3. What strategies do principals use to develop an evolving level of competence?
4. How do principals monitor their understanding, practice, and the development of competence?
5. How do principals integrate new understandings into practice?
6. How do principals reframe their understandings based on experiences?
7. How do principals question themselves in practice?

The results of this study were not entirely expected. From the beginning, participants described that they learn from experiences by reflecting upon them. The principals described mistakes as opportunities to learn. Paying attention to others was achieved through monitoring reactions, consulting with others, and gathering feedback.

The descriptions of reflective practice did not follow the clear definitions of reflection-on-practice and reflection-in-practice. Rather, the principals described how they reflect as a way to make sense of their jobs, evaluate their own performance, and learn from mistakes. The principals learn from mistakes as a way to learn from experiences and view mistakes as a time for reflection. The principals described

openness to learning, risking, and failing. The principals described how reflection was important to decision making and planning.

The principals described their efforts to develop their own professional competence. In monitoring their performance and growth, they looked for evidence in their practice and gathered feedback to monitor themselves. They paid attention to multiple factors in the school environment. The participants described the importance of their core values.

The unexpected results were the significant emphasis on gathering feedback, consulting with others, gathering evidence, and learning from mistakes. Feedback was described as a way to learn from experiences, a strategy for reflective practice, and a way to monitor performance and growth. Consulting was described as a strategy for problem solving and decision making. These themes and others informed the principals as learners about how the principals regulate their performance and growth.

How Do Principals Learn from Experience?

Each participant was asked to respond to the question, "How do you learn from experience?" Later in the interview, each participant was also asked to reflect on a critical incident that occurred in the last six months and describe how he or she learned from the experience. The analyses of both questions are in this section.

Each of the participants had thoughtful responses to how they learn from experience. Learning from experience was described as a central avenue to professional learning and growth. One principal described the importance of being a principal in learning to be a principal. Matthew said: "It's reaffirmed for me that learning to become a good principal requires you to be in that position. You can never become a good principal until you are a principal." His idea was extended by a principal with more experience in the role. The experiences in the role enable a principal to look back and examine how his or her practice has changed over time.

> Abigail: As I look at it now, in the seventh year, that I think is where most of the learning and the growth takes place, in the actual practice of being a principal. Learning from all the different experiences. I know that year one, I know I'm doing things differently than I was in year one, and I think I'm much more prepared because of the background that I'm gaining through my experiences. There's a lot to be said about learning by doing.

The openness to learn from experiences was described by most participants. Learning from experiences was described as a way to improve practice as a result of the experiences on the job.

> Ryan: No matter what it is, after four years you've gone through most things. You've never gone through everything but always something new. From each experience, you take the good and the bad. You look at it, what I did well. What could have been improved? Then you change the next time. And the next time you do the same thing. Then you work toward perfection eventually .... When another similar incident comes around, I naturally come up with a better solution than I did the last time I did it. I always try to build on it. Some of it's conscious. Some of it's subconscious, depending on the significance of the problem.

The principal interfaces with different people and stakeholders in the education process. The modes of interaction vary. Learning from these interactions and observations was described as important:

> Lauren: I think that's the only way to learn. Every day, if you don't learn from what's happening, you've made a mistake in waking up that day. Keeping your eyes open and watching things around you. Learning about people and how they operate, how they think, watching kids in their development, all of those are skills that you need to be able to apply tomorrow. Every day you learn a new lesson.

The principals were all asked to describe how they learn from experience. From all of the responses, a number of theme clusters emerged. The descriptions of the phenomena of how principals learn from experience include learning from mistakes, gathering feedback related to an experience, monitoring the reactions of others, and consulting with other principals.

Learning from Mistakes

Learning from experience implies that the principal will take the results of a previous experience or previous experiences and apply the learning to a current or future situation. Principals compare a current situation to previous experience and ask what can be improved? How can I learn from failures? The comparison of the situations does not have to occur just within one's own practice.

> Matthew: Going back and thinking about okay now think of the facts of the situation. As I'm becoming more experienced as a principal, I'm able to go back on experiences that I've dealt with specifically. But in my early principalship it was looking back from my teaching to see how that principal handled the situation. Or when I was an AP [associate principal], how did the

> middle school principal handle that kind of situation? I went back through the thought process--well, what are the things that led up to it and how can I compare the situations? Maybe use past experience to reform the current practice.

Some principals described comparing a current situation to previous experiences as a way of learning from experience. Many more principals described learning from failures and mistakes as a way to learn from experience. The phenomenon of learning from mistakes seems to rely on a willingness to learn from mistakes. The principal must be open to learning in this way.

> Lauren: You have to be able to let go. It's very hard for me to admit that I made a mistake. To let go of what was not working and to be able to actually move on with what you've learned. Now, I don't take it personally and realize that something didn't work and I need to move on from it. Don't beat yourself up on it when you make a mistake. That's how I keep myself growing and learning.

The ability to learn from experiences, both positive experiences and failures, was described differently. When situations go well, the principal may not receive the same kinds of feedback as when the situation does not go as well or is perceived as a failure or mistake. The successes and failures in the principalship are public.

> Michael: As far as doing things well, it's a little bit harder to learn from there because you just kind of do things and there's kind of a silent majority which is kind of interesting. You don't know if you're doing it quite right or what they're used too, but they're ok with how it's going, not making waves. So learning from positive experiences, you just kind of a get a feeling that worked out well. People were happy. People came to the table and participated and had dialogue when needed. Now learning from the mistakes is a little bit different, and that's where you hear back from Why did you do this? What could we do next time to make that a little more palatable for all involved?

The ability to pay attention to what works and what does not work in practice was described as important in learning from experiences. Learning from experiences in this way was considered a continuous improvement strategy.

> Samantha: I have learned from my experiences, as you go off and try something new, or attempt to do something, as well planned as it could be, and as many people you talk to and run it past, in the end of some real good reflection and talking with some people you respect, you look for . . . a good example of this is your comprehensive safety plan. A comprehensive safety plan can be everything in place. I watch for what's going to fly apart because that's the part you need to address and work on. Every time I try something, I look to see areas that are falling apart or aren't smooth, or what happened that caused it to be rough? What could we do to smooth it out more? That's how I'm learning. I'm looking for what's falling apart.

The phenomena of learning from experiences that do not go well depend on openness to learning from mistakes. One of the themes in the interviews was a willingness to take risks. The ability to learn by trying something new was described repeatedly. The principals described that continuous improvement requires the willingness to try new things and to learn from the implementation. Taking risks is important in learning from experiences.

> Andrew: The biggest learning tool is to take that risk of doing something you're not sure about and when you fail, it is sometimes a better learning experience than when you succeed. You see ways you could have done it differently. So you have ideas for how you may want to do it next time. Sometimes when you do have successes there are still things you can modify and make better. Evaluate what you have done, seeing how well it worked out and from there, move on to how you could make it better or how can we keep this consistent or how can we get more people involved?

One way to describe the phenomena of learning from experience is to consider learning from mistakes or failures. Mistakes and failures provide opportunities for

the principal to learn. A willingness to take risks and an orientation to continuous improvement were described by the participants. Another way learning from experience was described by the principals is to gather feedback from others.

Gathering Feedback from Others

Principals will gather feedback from others in a variety of ways. Principal Emma described her experience gathering feedback as, "You have to take each situation after it's done and sit back and say, "Did I do that right? Could I have done something different? You can't just do that by yourself." In some cases, principals gather feedback formally or informally; in some cases, they gather feedback by monitoring the reactions of others. A number of principals described the phenomena of learning from experience by engaging in conversations with members of the staff.

> Abigail: That's ongoing. I think one of the big parts of learning is to have those informal conversations with people and look at certain leaders in the building among the staff that you know have good leadership qualities and you know do lead their own peers and in talking with them, it could be just informally, how they feel things are going give an indication to me if I'm being effective and if there is change really being made.

The reasons for seeking feedback from staff may vary. Some principals described seeking feedback to learn how things were going. Other principals described soliciting as more of a way to check that things were going well.

> Madison: So finding safe people to talk with, safe colleagues have been an important thing for me to have so that I can make use of my experiences here. I don't trust my judgment all the time. I need to bounce it off of someone.

A more formal way to gather feedback on an experience is to engage established groups such as the building leadership team in a structured debriefing of a situation. Such an opportunity is described as opening up to multiple perspectives. It is also an opening up of the principal to feedback on performance.

> Samantha: What I've done, I've talked with our team leaders who are the grade-level representatives, almost like a department chairperson. Talked openly, What did you see that went well? What did you see we need to tighten up on or ways to change it to work better? I welcome that kind of input. You may not see it as someone else sees it. Or maybe they didn't see that it fell apart and thought it went well. I look for feedback.

Engaging others in conversation about how a particular situation went can also lead others to learn from experiences. One principal described her experience with engaging others.

> Sarah: I am a collaborative person. Whenever situations, issues, or items come up, I'll always bounce things off of my colleagues. When I say colleagues, I mean my team. My associate and assistant principals. I figure we discuss before, during, and after. Then not only am I learning, but they are learning. A big part of what you do as a principal is to develop your staff.

Finally, some principals go outside of their school building and in some cases outside of the field of education to solicit feedback as a way to learn from experience. The principals described sharing an experience.

> Isabella: I talk with other caring educators and friends, not necessarily educators. Sometimes it's just unburdening. Probably telling stories about what's bringing me down. Even with family members. My mama, my older sons, most anyone for whom I have respect will listen.

Monitoring Reactions

Monitoring the reactions of others can also occur without soliciting feedback as described above. The principal pays attention to the reactions of others and the impact of the situation or decision on students, staff, parents, learning, etc.

> Nicholas: That reflection and analysis come in part from what people say. It's not just me sitting under a tree sipping on lemonade. It's from what people tell me, it's from the input, the reaction of people afterwards. The impact it has on how we operate or the choices we make thereafter. It's taking all those pieces into account, and even in events that occur later on that have some kind of connection or link to whatever has happened, it's taking to reflecting on that piece. As opposed to doing it in isolation, these things don't happen in isolation.

The ability to pay attention to multiple factors can lead a principal to know that even if something has worked in the past, it may not work again. This professional judgment is gained through experience.

> Sophia: Over time, you just know past practices. You know, well this worked probably 75% of the time and I'm not even going to go there with this approach because I know I'd fall on my face trying that. So good role models and a people watcher, seeing how other people act and share their experiences and pick up on that as well.

Consulting with Others

The principals also described that learning from experience occurs by consulting with others. Consulting with others is differentiated from soliciting feedback. Consulting is asking specific questions, bouncing problems off one

another, sharing common struggles. One principal (Madison) provided a specific example: "Usually I'll call a Title I principal who has the same kind of kids I have."

A common form of consultation involves decisions that are yet to be made. Another form of consultation is consulting on strategies. Consultation can be considered learning from the experiences of others.

> Matthew: A lot of times, my biggest resource is to call other principals. I've got this, this, and this going on, what do you think? What would you do? I'm going to do this, what do you think? It seems that comes this way a lot, too. So I don't think I'm the only one who would do that.

One principal provided a number of examples of the kinds of issues on which she consults with other principals.

> Olivia: That varies. I do want to say that I have a close-knit group of principal friends. There's probably three that I could pick up the phone and just call and let me bounce this off of them. I'm struggling with this, I can't decide, I'm on the fence, or what do you think? That can vary from just going outside, Is it too cold, Are you guys going out? all the way to, Man, we just had our principals' meeting--what do you think of that topic we were talking about. I'm torn here with some issues with "No Child Left Behind"--there are some issues there. A lot of it comes to dollars and sense. Okay, is it worth putting this money in it, do I do this? Or do I do what's morally right? A lot of times it's nice, there's a small group I can call on, which I appreciate. We do that for each other.

Some principals desire more formal ways to consult with other principals. The consultation would be used to generate strategies to common issues or problems.

> Samantha: I tend to want to network with other people. So I'm at that stage where I want to pull other Title I principals together and say, Let's all sit down and talk about what we're each doing in our buildings. At one of our meetings, we did openly share what we're doing at our buildings. There were tremendous things going on. Maybe if we openly sit down and share all of these good things, we could eliminate some of those pitfalls that you might

> find yourself in because someone else had already been in the pit and shared that. What works, what doesn't, etc?

The desire to consult with others also identifies a theme in the descriptions, the notion that being a principal can be a lonely and isolated role. Consulting with other principals is a way to build connections with others in similar situations.

> Samantha: I bounce things off of the assistant principal. Being a principal can sometimes make you feel like an island. An isolated feeling, and I think it's important that you have confidants that you can go talk to. Sometimes you want to be guarded, not sharing with people.

The notion of learning from experience through reflective practice was described as follows. More descriptions of this way of learning from experiences will be forthcoming.

> Nicholas: The biggest way I've learned from my experiences is to reflect on them from different angles. You make decisions; hopefully by taking as much information as I can, make a choice that holds the integrity of our mission and what we're trying to do as a school. Holds the integrity of how we manage our staff here. But when all is said and done, it's not over yet. You need to take a step back and think about what went right, what did not go right for the people who felt disenfranchised for whatever reason or felt like it was the wrong decision. Just to reflect from their point of view. The ultimate is, Did this support my philosophy as a building leader. And what we want to accomplish all together? If this was a stone, you keep turning it over until its glass smooth. You got to get to a point where you gather information and you feel confident enough to move on. You can't have everything resolved. As you reflect on it, let it go and move on.

The description of the phenomena of how principals learn from experience was described well by one participant. His response contains introspection of individual performance, consideration of feedback and input of others, the difference

between positive and negative experiences, and how the experiences will be used in the future.

> Jacob: That's a strange question, Eric. You live through a phenomenon and you are attuned to your own reaction, inner states and you self-monitor as you go through the phenomena. And you note the consequences, both external from the outside world and internal from the phenomenological perspective as you're living it. You note the reactions of other people and act the results of your actions, parted [sic] and reflect upon it. And based upon all those different variables, hopefully you'll learn something from it. If it was a positive experience, and I'm responding in a very general way, put that in the bank and say, I made some good decisions there, I handled it well. Pretty effective. Store it. On the other hand, if things don't go well, according to how you reacted to it internally or other people, or the ostensible results, had a bad outcome. You also learn from that because you look back upon that and say, You know I didn't handle that very well but we learn from that and not make that same mistake again. I think in a nutshell it's pretty much how I operate.

Learning from Critical Incidents

A portion of the interview was focused on a critical incident and the learning that emerged from the incident. Each of the participants was asked to think back over the last six months and identify an incident at work that he or she remembered causing great discomfort, pressure, or difficulty, to share the incident and how he or she learned from it. None of the participants had difficulty identifying an incident. The analysis describes the emerging themes of the learning that occurred as a result of the critical incidents.

Two major themes emerged in the analysis. The first theme is acting in the best interest of the student. This theme is characterized by the realization of competing and conflicting pressures or forces, identification of the competing

interests, and action or decision that will benefit the student. The second theme is the professional introspection. The critical incident created a situation in which the individual principal questions core values and beliefs.

Acting in the Best Interests of Kids

One theme in the critical incident coded segments was making decisions on the basis of what is best for kids. The principals described all of the competing pressures and influences within the incident or occurrence. The principals were able to identify the factors and, after struggling with the issues, land on acting in the best interests of the child. While this may sound obvious, the pressures experienced by the principal, including others' interpretations of what is in the best interests of the child, create the conflict of the critical incident.

> Jacob: What drove me was that child was suffering. All of that stuff was not doing him any good. He would spend 70% of his time out of the classroom, whether it was in my office, or someone else, or in the hallway. I learned from that time. You try to make it work. You try to accommodate. You try to make it work. You try to pull out all stops to make it a win-win. This was never going to work that way. That was a learning experience. There are some parents in some situations that no matter what you do you can't get it to work. Realizing that the kid was suffering the most, I could get through it and do the damage control on the parent. But it was the kid who was suffering and that's when I began to take steps to get him into an alternative school despite the mother's objections. Probably the worst I've had.

The pressure of acting in the best interest of the child does not have to come from parents as it did in the previous incident. In this critical incident, the principal

describes a situation where staff were upset with a decision the principal made in response to a student issue brought by teachers.

> Matthew: I dealt with the situation in a way that I thought best, but I couldn't trace where I created such an issue. So I kept going back to asking what should I have done differently. I finally concluded, I thought it out, I made the best decision I thought I could make at the time and best for the child. I'll always do that. So I became more comfortable with my decision. It was going back to reflecting why the two teachers were disappointed with my decision. You can't please all the people all the time.

Six different principals in the study addressed making decisions on the basis of what is in the best interests of the student within the responses to the critical incidents. Four of the incidents related to issues involving a special education student. Ultimately, the principals reported sorting out the competing interests and making the decision on what was in the best interest of the student.

> Ryan: What I learned was how valuable it is to actually follow your professional assessment, whether it's the special ed situation or anything else for that matter, if you truly believe it's in the best interest of that student. It would have been very easy to do a couple of things to accommodate those parents. But to me, it would have been counterproductive for this student. We fought tooth and nail; in the long run, we ended up getting the services this girl needed. We have had a very successful year because of the implementation of these new services for her and proved over the last five months that it was the right thing to do. Going back to reflection, assessment, I wouldn't have done anything differently. It was at times grueling, but ultimately the payoff was there and the payoff went to the student.

Professional Introspection

Another theme that emerged from critical incidents and the resulting learning related to professional introspection and the impact of the incident on professional

practice. A critical incident, which none of the 15 participants had difficulty identifying, had an impact on one's self. The impact was both personal and professional.

> Jacob: Finally I realized that what I needed to do was build that box, wall around her. As soon as I would begin to draw boundaries is what would really set her off. She wanted to control the whole thing. This was a huge, huge learning process and very uncomfortable because I am not a confrontational person. If I can sit down and in a rational way, problem solve, meet you half way. I'm not so good at being highly confrontational. I can say no, but that pushes my buttons and she knew how to do that. That was her style, her coping mechanism as a parent of a special ed kid. When I finally began to realize and put together that all of this bottom line, part of it was what it was doing to me. I would get to the point where every time my phone rang I would cringe. That is very bad. Very unhealthy and for me to allow things to get to that point, where every time my phone would ring I would cringe. I would go home and think about it. And to allow one person to have that much power and begin to influence the culture of this building, 600 kids. . . . Now of course, some of the nice-guyness has been washed away and I will never allow a parent to get to a point where they can have that much influence or impact either on me as a human being or as a principal or on the building. But the motivation of that is going to be because everything that I am going to try in the future will be looked at as what is the best benefit for the student bar everything else.

The incidents were cited by the principal as critical because of the impact of the incident on the core of the person. The incident was critical because of what the principal learned about self, values, strengths, and vulnerabilities, etc. In this incident, the principal described an incident where a former student brought her daughter to the school building. The incident was described as critical in the connection to the core purposes and values of the principal.

> Isabella: So just seeing her and realizing who she was brought back that wave of feeling inadequate. My star student and look at what she does. I thought I was doing so well and my work is ineffective. I'm not making a difference the

way I need to be. I did learn a lot and grow a lot from then. But it was disheartening to be reminded by seeing her.

EM: What did you learn about hope and discouragement?

Isabella: It's a good thing there is a team here because I needed to do something right away. Not let them fall through the cracks. But I just got a glimmer that we had made a difference. I had enough investment in the family and right away the mother connected and chatted and told me about her partner and we steered it toward her hope for the future and she listened. So having the building to which she was drawn was one strength. Having the sense to have appropriate books right there. Having a supportive staff to run to and a system in place that would not let her fall through the cracks. It's the philosophy here: if people show up on the wrong day, we're still glad to see them. I get a charge out of being able to model that. That's part of where I know I make a difference, when that kind of thing happens and staff members notice.

Another principal described the importance of being true to herself and the need to be completely honest.

EM: What do subtleties of politics mean to you?

Madison: When the decision is saying something true or saying something that will move me ahead professionally, I often say the true things. That gets me in trouble. I don't have a lot of patience for people who are making decisions that are not best for kids. I'm often a renegade in terms of saying the unpopular thing.

The issue of integrity continued in the descriptions of the learning that resulted from a critical incident.

Nicholas: If I'm going to fall on a sword, it better be a sword that I pick. If I'm going to die on any hill or defend any perspective, it's got to be something I firmly believe in, not because someone else wants me to do that. That's what that decision was based on. . . . It's holding to the integrity of who I believe I am and what I believe are decisions that ought to be made against. That reaffirmed the fact when you are faced with a crisis or a tough decision, you make the choice that you believe in, that you know you can defend.

The analysis of the critical incidents and the resulting learning was descriptive of the nature of decisions principals make and the impact of the decisions. The principals described how tough decisions are made. The principals described both the personal and professional impact of the critical incidents. While each of the 15 different critical incidents is not reported here, the themes identified are reflective of the incidents of the remaining participants.

What Are the Processes of Reflection Used by Principals?

The next research question was: "What are the different processes of reflection used by principals?" This research question was addressed by asking participants to describe their experiences with reflective practice and the meaning of those experiences. Each of the participants spoke readily to their experiences with reflecting on their practice. Engaging in reflective practice was also described as central to the professional practice of the role. One participant, Nicholas, indicated, "To be an effective leader, you have to constantly be reflective."

> Nicholas: For me to articulate concretely when it happens, how it happens, and who I would be or what would happen if I didn't reflect, it's kind of like saying, it's just part of who I am. I'm an analyzer. Part of being analytic is to reflect on things.
>
> Michael: Well, for me it's almost second nature. I'm always cognizant of what I'm doing, why I'm doing it this way. Am I sensitive with the other people involved? I think that way and make a conscious effort to do that. When it comes to reflecting, it's second nature. You do it in the car; if I have free time, I can use it to think. I have shut the door for 15 minutes to think and process. Typically after dealing with a parent or a teacher concern, I take

> time to do that, why were they saying that?. . . . What did they really want?. . . And so it's very natural.

The descriptions of the phenomena of reflective practice were addressed in four broad areas. The initial description of reflective practice was on the experiences of principals. The next three sections were descriptions of the phenomena decision making, reflective practice and planning, and reflective practice strategies. These three descriptions emerged as significant organizers of the experiences of the principals. Within each of the four descriptions are emergent themes.

Phenomena of Reflective Practice

Six themes comprise the initial description of the phenomena of reflective practice. The experiences of the participants with reflective practice center on different ways the principals thought about their practice and how the participants learned from experiences. The six different themes are making sense of experiences, reflecting and evaluating professional performance, learning from mistakes, reflecting on leadership success, responding emotionally to reflection, and reflecting as preparation.

Making Sense of Experience

Reflective practice was described as a way to make sense of experiences. The principals described that they think about their work both at school and outside of school.

> Olivia: Just in the job alone. I'm always thinking about it. It's not like you just come to work and you can forget about it when you go home. It's everywhere. If I'm somewhere, something will pop up in my head. I'm always reflecting. I find myself always doing that. How did that go? Yeah, that went pretty well. No, I don't like how that went, that didn't go so well. What else can I do?

The principals described reflective practice as a way to make sense of what is working and what is not working. Not many of the participants had the experiences of serving as a principal in multiple settings. The following principal was reflecting on what worked in her previous setting and why it would not work in the current school.

> Sophia: Right now I'm currently just reflecting on how I was a principal at [my previous school]. What made me successful there? Because the demographics in both of our buildings are very much the same. But there are definite differences between the two buildings. The obvious is the size. I went from administrating a student body of 800 and about 50 faculty and support people to a very small school and yet when I look at what's working here I'm constantly stopping myself and saying but— this is the same thing you did at [previous school] but it can't happen here because . . . the dynamics doesn't match what's here. It's really hard because I . . . want it to work and it's forcing me into looking at how I used to do business and the way things worked. And having to shake myself up and say, but the personalities are different, the kids are the same. They are a constant.
> But the parents, some things are changing there.

Reflective practice is a way to make sense of a current experience and extends to thinking about "Who am I?" in this role.

> Isabella: I know that I do that. I have had stages in my career when I could recognize that lack of fit or discomfort or a feeling of inadequacy. All of those can motivate something. I don't know to what I can attribute it other than thinking, talking people. That's how we live. That's metacognition. I do have a habit of pausing, consciously setting aside time.

The principals described a general experience with reflective practice as a way of thinking about their job, their performance, and questioning themselves in practice. The principals described themselves as reflective. The experiences described indicate that the principals routinely think about situations and question how they went.

> Emma: Just as in the classroom, you have to be a reflective person. You have to take each situation after it's done and sit back and say, Did I do that right? Could I have done something different?

> Jacob: Same thing is true as a principal, constantly doing that, just like breathing, Was that a good thing? Thinking about other things you've done and saying, To what extent should I do that, should I handle this situation the same way or do I tweak it? That's all covered in reflection.

Some of the principals described how they make sense of an experience while they are in the experience. The following principal described the experience of processing the situation in action but holding on to the experience to consider it later.

> Nicholas: I think you have to be, yes. You are going to have to process things where you are as things are happening. Whether it is having a staff meeting implementing your view or what the district has coming down. You've got to be able to process there and then what the issues are or what the teachers are saying are the issues so that you can address it somehow or let them know they've been heard. You have to make sense of what's going on when it's going on but at the same time tuck away those pieces that you know you will have to mull over later and make sure you get back to it. When I say I think about it all the time, it's more like it's on a back burner. Not like my mind is always on it.

Another principal described how she thinks about a situation while she is in it. She described how she monitors the situation and then makes adjustments.

> Olivia: You need action right there. Sometimes you look at them and see it off of their responses. If I see a lot of people starting to chit chat about something in a negative way, you face it. You didn't get it, they didn't take it the way I meant it, but based on their reaction and look on the faces, body language, you

> can definitely tell. You try to feed off of that. There have been times when it was taken the wrong way or didn't understand. There have been times where the meeting had to be continued because the talk or the reactions didn't happen until later and we decided to have another meeting.

Some participants described their experiences with reflective practice as stepping out and looking back. This is another way principals make sense of experiences.

> Lauren: Yeah. It's not only stepping out and looking back in at yourself, but being able to look at everything else around you. On a daily basis, little of my time is spent in this office. That's why I try to spend weekends trying to get everything else done. Being in the classrooms, watching, being able to be reflective on the teacher's interaction with the students and the students' response to that and then thinking about my relationship with that teacher and how can I assist that teacher and maybe moving to another level of being more of an effective teacher. That's the type of reflection I have a luxury of being able to do here. It's a small building with a small group of students, whereas in a regular elementary building the principal may not have that luxury.

The ability to detach from reflection on personal performance and to get others' reactions to the situation was described as important. It was also the description to being open to feedback from others.

> Lauren: A lot more goes on in my head than I ever get out in words. I don't sleep much at night. I spend a lot of time mulling over what happened in a day and going through what I said and how people reacted to that. Trying to not only get my own reactions on it but I've built up enough trust in people to where I can elicit their opinions on it and they feel open enough to share them with me even if negative. That's helpful. If you're going to work within that needing to reflect on things and move on that, you have to have what I call open door policy where people feel comfortable to come in and yell at you when they are upset. They have to feel comfortable telling you did something wrong. You have to react to that. That took me a while to build here because I was an outsider. But once that was built, everything moved in the right direction.

Evaluating Performance

Principals described their experiences of reflective practice as away to make sense of experiences. The participants also described reflective practice as a way to evaluate their practice for professional growth and improvement.

> Madison: It helps me become good at my work. I need to look at my work outside the daily decision making. I want to become better at what I'm doing.

Experiences with reflective practice enable the principals to not only make sense of the experience but also be evaluative about performance.

> Andrew: It teaches. We give students assignments and tell them to do homework. It's a reflective practice. It's a practice of what you've learned all day. It teaches me that some things I did were right on, or good, or could have some improvement. Some are real losers. The whole idea of reflection gives you the chance to evaluate what you are doing. A lot of times it's done while you're doing things. I wish that I would write down what my thoughts are.

The evaluation of professional practice through reflection can provide the principal with a sense of direction. The principal will learn what kinds of things to work on in the future.

> Emma: It helps you professionally grow and helps you think about what you could have done better or differently. It keeps me sane. If I didn't reflect, I would have no direction. I wouldn't know where I was and I wouldn't know where I was trying to go. It's a sanity thing.

Learn from Mistakes

The principals described that one of the ways they learn from experiences is to learn from mistakes. The principals also described experiences of taking risks and

learning from those experiences. The same theme emerged in relation to reflective practice.

> Ryan: By trying something new, looking what about was good or not, and then improving on the next time, having success builds confidence for the next thing to do.

The experience of taking a risk and reflecting on the experience was described as a way to evaluate practice for future growth.

Another theme within the descriptions of reflective practice was on reflecting on situations characterized as mistakes. The evaluation of situations as a way to grow was described by Andrew:

> If it didn't turn out as you anticipated, you've still learned. Keep approaching and attacking it to find ways that work for me. The experience of it is being able to look back at what you did and evaluate it.

The experience of using reflection as a way to make sense of experiences, to evaluate performance, and to question themselves emerge in the following description of learning from a mistake.

> Madison: It's usually after I've done wrong. Very seldom do I think about it if I'm doing a great job. I start to think, if I want to do better in that, how would I go about it? Do I have any expertise in this area at all? Do I have to find someone else? Who would that person be? Where could I get that information? Sometimes it's just, boy, I didn't think that one through. I need to restructure, if I would do that one again, this is how I would do it. I missed a cue. I do that more in my treadmill time, my prayer time. But it's usually after a negative consequence more than a positive outcome. I would like to get to the point where I would think reflectively prior to that.

The professional willingness and openness to learning from mistakes seemed to be a precondition to reflecting on situations that do not go well.

> Lauren: Some days it can be very painful. There are days when I look back on things and think if I had just said that a little differently it would have moved ahead. Or I'll mull over mistakes I've made, so being reflective isn't always a good thing. Being able to be creative enough to where you can say ok, I've made that mistake, and moving on from it and being able to come back the next day and approach it differently is hard.

Considering Leadership

So far, the descriptions illustrated the general experiences of reflective practice including making sense of experiences, evaluating performance, and learning from mistakes. Reflective practice was also described as a way to consider one's leadership. The segments here touch on the three previous themes but are done so specifically about the principal's leadership. In this segment, the principal described her questioning of performance as a leader.

> Abigail: Then you are breaking it apart and looking at--here's how we did and what did I do to get us there? Whether it was planning for professional development or in-service days. Did I do that well enough? Could I have made it more effective? Are there things that I need to read, are there some other things that I need to get a better handle on so that I can--it takes the breaking down from that point.

In the following segment, the principal described the experience of reflecting on her leadership in a new school building. She described the experience of thinking back about previous leadership learning and how they will fit in the new situation.

> Sophia: Looking back at the way I used to do things and I'm beginning to see myself change in terms of not only am I trying to get people to be empowered, but establishing the trust. It was a given that I'm the trust. At least at [my previous school] I felt very well respected and coming here I am starting that over again. So I look back and see what did I do then that I could be doing now and will that work here as well? I'm transforming myself as well.

Leadership in schools depends on having a staff that is following. This description of the phenomena of reflective practice illustrated how the principal thinks about each staff member as a leader and a follower.

> Lauren: No matter what my vision is, no one's ever right there with me. You have to build those steps to get people where you are at. Some of that reflection is reflecting on who you have in your building and who you think is at what part of the leader you want to be. Then you have to think about how you're going to get each person individually to move ahead. It's very different for each person. You need to be able to filter that out.

This description was followed by the statement, "If no one is following you, you're just going there yourself."

Certain aspects of the leadership role of the principal were described as prompting engagement in reflection-on-practice. In this case, planning professional development was cause for reflection.

> Andrew: When we have staff in-services and we have to talk about the school improvement plan, what we're doing because we're a Title I school, those are times when I spend more time looking back on what we did or how we're doing it.

In another case, teacher evaluations fostered reflection on practice.

> Andrew: Evaluating teachers is the biggest reflective time. You sit back and look at how can I help them? They may be doing fine, moving in the right direction.

Effective leadership is also dependent on strong values of the leader. This principal described the influence of values in reflecting on practice.

> Michael: Yeah, with a big emphasis on constructivism but the emphasis there is constructing your own knowledge, but at the same time, there is something behind that, your values and beliefs and the reason why you construct things that way. That is something to consider, you need to be well grounded and

> comfortable with your own beliefs and values in order to take a stand on those issues and decisions. I think that piece is always there when you are reflecting, more rarely do you question those fundamental beliefs and values - more often or not, you think of the options and the choices you have and then you make the best choice, but there's something behind that.

Emotional Responses to Reflection

The experience of reflective practice was described in many ways. Principals have described reflective practice as ways to make sense of experiences, to evaluate practice, to learn from mistakes, and to consider their leadership. Another of the themes in the descriptions was how reflecting on experience feels emotionally. The range of emotions includes worry, anxiety, and satisfaction.

> Olivia: Varies. Sometimes anxiety. Worrying or nervous about things. But if I've had a good experience, I find some self-satisfaction, which is cool. I find that the more I stay in the field. My first three years I felt something was not going right, but the longer I'm here, now my "ah-has" are coming.

One principal described the experience of reflection as personally critical.

> Samantha: I'm not really sure. I'm so hard on myself. I'm critical of myself. I never see myself doing that "great" job. It always could be a better job or a different approach. I'm maybe too hard on myself with self-reflection and don't give my staff enough credit that they should get and I find myself seeking out these confidants and going to them for pats on the back, etc. Self-reflection for me is there, but I need to take a step back and not be as critical of what I've done.

Another principal described the critical nature of the experience of reflective practice.

> Isabella: When I'm second guessing myself, then I usually call for support. I can think of times when I've called higher up or another principal to say this is what I did, what do you think?

Anticipatory Reflection

The final theme within the description of the experiences and meaning of reflective practice was anticipatory reflection. Principals described reflecting in advance of a situation in order to be prepared and organized, considering multiple options, and prioritizing. Jacob described reflecting as anticipation:

> Yes, and on the front end too. Thinking about it and anticipating is also a form of reflection also. Thinking about what your options are and how you are going to participate or do this thing. That's when you factor in all these past experiences, the ones that seem to be germane to that context.

Matthew described how reflecting on the day ahead can help prioritize and plan work:

> It clears my mind, allows me to come in with a good sense of what I need to do as a result of the things that happened yesterday or what I could do to organize my day better. It's often a time when you're thinking random thoughts coming into your head. Helps bring the millions of things that go on in your day as a principal. Helps me sort things out as to "this I need to do today," "this must be done now," "I need to do this," . . . prioritize my needs and the needs of the day.

Reflective Practice and Decision Making

A number of participants spoke specifically about the role of reflective practice in decision making. The principals spoke about their experiences thinking through decisions and reflecting on the information leading to the decision.

> Nicholas: If this was a stone, you keep turning it over until it's glass smooth. You got to get to a point where you gather information and you feel confident enough to move on.

The principals spoke about the speed at which decisions need to be made. The principals spoke about their experiences reflecting on the impact of the decisions. In general reflecting on decisions was described as a positive experience. As Ryan said:

> It gives me more insight and knowledge base to make better decisions in the long run.

The identified themes within this group are contemplating decisions, the speed of decision making, and considering the impact of decisions.

Contemplating Decisions

One principal responded to his experiences with reflective practice as decision making. The principal described some of the consideration in making a decision that will affect the school building. The principal illustrated how he questions himself in relation to decision making, posing the question, "Why did I make the decision I did?"

> Michael: I'd call it decision making. So there is a fine line between just why you make the decisions you do. . . . It's very interesting to see something that comes down from central office. Here's what you have to do, then to see how I implement it here for my staff and then what I hear how it's implemented in other buildings. Why did I make that decision? Well, obviously I was thinking about it differently based on my staff, the way they are used to working, the culture here as opposed to another building. So reflecting [versus] making decisions, kind of a fine line.

The role of the principal is a decision-making role. The principal makes decisions in planning, principals make decisions in the moment, and principals make decisions after the fact.

> Jacob: Decision making on the front end when I plan as a teacher or a principal. Decision making in the present as I actually do the thing, am I going too fast, am I going too slow, do I need to use more visuals, do I build more support for that person, do I stand up? Do I get the Kleenex when they are crying, etc? And decision making occurs at the back end; after the event is over you reflect back. Again, it's that monitor of internal and external that's the key. That's how educators, teachers become better in their craft. By being conscious, that cognitive aspect of their decision making as they go along. Some will do it more regularly and more explicitly.

This principal is philosophical in the role of decision making. Decision making is a part of education, and education is a form of communication. The principal described his experiences monitoring situations and constantly reacting and responding to cues in order to make adjustments.

> Jacob: The five-minute lecture is one of decision making. The only profession that makes more decisions than educators are air traffic controllers. Constantly making decisions because it's being an educator and it's not just in education, it's in a lot of professions. One might extrapolate it to life itself. It's organic. It's alive. It's a relationship in which you are transmitting something, sharing something, skill, knowledge, etc., but it's organic. It's between two individuals and just as in communication, which education really is a form of communication, there is interplay. Just as I'm saying something to you or showing something to you, I'm not doing it in a vacuum. To the extent that I'm a good educator or a good administrator, I'm also monitoring your reaction. And then I'm subtly changing what I do in response to that. That's decision making.

Principals are also asked to consider and make decisions that are brought to them. Teachers or other community members bring problems to the principal for a decision. Situations are brought to the principal for consideration and action. This principal described his experiences considering these kinds of situations and what circumstances make the decisions difficult. He described the challenge of making a decision that impacts his core values.

> Michael: When I do have people come and articulate a problem well enough, those are the decisions you need to stop and remove yourself from. You are not going to give them an answer there, but you need to think about that. I can't say everybody does that naturally, but that's where you need to tell people--hold on a minute, I need to process this and I need to think about what you are saying because it's getting to those core beliefs. By the things that people present to me when it does get to that level, you definitely know that this is a decision that will take more time because this is getting to the root that is along the lines of what I think is right, but I need to question and think it through. Those are the difficult decisions.

Speed of Decision Making

Within the realm of decision making, principals reflect on their role as the decision maker. The speed at which the principal arrives at a decision was described by a number of principals. Michael described others' expectations for speed:

> Exactly. Kind of a two-edged sword because I think if you ask anybody they would say you have to reflect and make good decisions, but for half the people that say that there is a whole other half that say your job is to make decisions and you are not quick enough. So you have to make them quickly and make them substantial and make the right decisions. Half the people appreciate that and half are anxiously waiting for the final ruling.

However, making a quick decision is not always necessary. Nicholas described that in most cases his experience is time to reflect and make a decision.

> Another thing too is there is very few things that happen that require an immediate decision. Unless it's an immediate crisis, you always have some time to gather information and process it.

Taking the time to think through a situation and to make a thoughtful decision was described as important.

> Matthew: I try to be real reflective in my thinking in terms of being patient with my decision making, not trying to jump to any rash decisions. Making a quick decision can have negative consequences.
>
> That's probably the one thing I've learned this year so far is that making a quick decision is not a good thing; you need to involve all people who are going to be impacted in that and that's where you get most of the feedback, is I didn't involve a teacher or two that should have been contacted.

Reflection on Impact

The experience of reflecting on a decision after it was made was described in a number of different ways. The ability to clearly identify issues and articulate the rationale for a decision was described. Since decision making is important to the role, the ability to articulate how and why a decision was made are related to perceived competence in the role.

> Matthew: Whereas now, in this position, I think it's very important to be reflective, because that helps you with your critical thinking skills in terms of how you're going to react to situations. If you don't have the ability to really process experiences in your own thought process, I think you appear less able to make a decision when you need to make a decision. So when you are able to say to yourself, you know I've given this much thought into something, it helps me organize and clarify my own thoughts.

The experience of reflective practice is also related to decision making through the consideration of the impact of the decision on others and the purpose of the school. This description also illustrates how this principal questioned himself in practice.

> Nicholas: The biggest way I've learned from my experiences is to reflect on it from different angles. You make decisions, hopefully by taking as much information as I can, make a choice that holds the integrity of our mission and

> what we're trying to do as a school. Holds the integrity of how we manage our staff here. But when all is said and done it's not over yet. You need to take a step back and think about what went right, what did not go right for the people who felt disenfranchised for whatever reason or felt like it was the wrong decision. Just to reflect from their point of view. The ultimate is did this [decision] support my philosophy as a building leader, and what we want to accomplish all together? If this was a stone, you keep turning it over until its glass smooth. You got to get to a point where you gather information and you feel confident enough to move on. You can't have everything resolved. As you reflect on it, let it go and move on.

Principals ask themselves, how did the decision affect others? The role of the principal is increasingly democratic. Involving stakeholders in decision processes is important to success in school leadership.

> Andrew: I do ask for input on things. There are some things I have made decisions about and said this is what we will do. Reflecting on how my [decision] affects the teachers, also trying to get a hold on how they see me and trying to reflect back to when I was a teacher and how did I see my principal. What did I expect from my principal? How did that all work?

In the descriptions of the experiences with reflecting on decision making, the principals described how they question themselves in practice and the kinds of questions they reflectively ask themselves.

> Michael: I would say pretty reflective principal, especially with it being the first few years, it's very rare that I make a decision and don't think "is that what they are used to, is that what they are used to seeing, or did that catch people out in left field?" So far, not too bad.

Principals discussed their role in decision making. The principals described their experiences reflecting on situations to make decisions. The principals described being in the moment and making decisions, and they described reflecting back on the decision they made. They described the impact of the speed of decision making and

when to take more time to think about the situation or gather more input. The participants described how they consider the impact of decision making on others.

Reflective Practice and Planning

Participants in the study described their experiences with reflecting on their practice in relation to planning. Two distinct themes emerged within this area. The first is the time the principals take to reflect on establishing a direction for the school or for programs. The second theme is more specifically focused on reflection on school improvement plans.

Direction Setting

The participants described their experiences thinking about the direction they would like to take the school. This principal described the importance of taking the time to reflect on expectations and capacities as he sets a direction.

> Ryan: It's vital as far as the total direction of the building. Without spending quality time, setting time aside just for reflection, I can't see how a school improvement plan or a professional development or even fun activities for the kids . . . how any of it can take place without thoroughly examining it at least once in a while in a way where you set time aside for it. Even though we talked about reflection, like a discipline problem or a telephone call, that just kind of happens, there is not a ton of thought that goes into it. But you need reflection to assess where your building and staff are. The expectations from the district and the community and be able to take all that in to move everything forward. That takes time. Sometimes the breaks we have like a long weekend or summer months, those times are revitalizing and give you a chance to look at all the good that has happened and gives you the energy to think ok, now it's time to push forward and how am I going to do that after I

> assess all these things that have occurred in the past year. Where are we going to go next year?

Another principal described her experiences using the longer summer break to think about the direction of the school. The summer provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been made and to consider the next steps.

> Abigail: Summertime is a great time for that. I don't just do it in the summertime. Car rides, shower in the morning . . . just thinking of what's happened this week? How were things handled? Could we make some changes as a team? Are there some things that I would do differently? That's a continual thing, almost daily. But then in the summertime it gets a little broader because people are gone and it's quieter around here and that's a good time to refocus--here's the vision, here's where we went, how far did we get? Looking at what our goals had been, which were accomplished--write down a list, where we need to continue on, and from that becomes the letter out to staff at the beginning of the year to get ready for the new year.

School Improvement Plan

Taking the time to reflect and plan is important. Ryan described his experience using student achievement data in making decisions about areas for a school improvement plan:

> Last spring was the time I wanted to start focusing on this differentiation, slow learners, special ed. Over the summer I thought about it a little more. Once the ISAT scores came in, that gave me the information I needed to push everything forward. To prove to the staff I was not making assumptions.

Turning the reflection and planning into action is described by another principal. This is also another example of the way a principal questions herself in practice.

> Madison: Now I do think programmatically ahead though. Last year I spent a lot of time thinking about what I gleaned in conversations from [assistant superintendent]. I took that and I respect him, so I thought about how I could make those suggestions happen. I began developing my special subjects schedule. Right now I'm researching full-day kindergarten and thinking about who will I put into that position? How will I make sure it works? What are the logistics?

Principals also reflect on current programs and initiatives in the school building. The reflection includes questioning the effectiveness of the programs and how to improve.

> Andrew: I also reflect on the programs we have within our school. What are you doing to keep these kids interested? What are we doing to motivate our children? How do we get our parents involved? Right now I'm in the middle of different readings on the topic of reading. How do we get parents to do it at home? As a first-year principal, I need to find out the building climate in terms of teachers' expectations, what they are already doing, what we need to evaluate, what to change. You make an adjustment for it.

This principal described her experience with considering how the school offerings need to change as the school community changes. She questioned how she can create or improve programs to meet the needs of her students and community.

> Olivia: Because there really isn't any new construction, but my enrollment is steadily going up. The demographics, Hispanics have increased in population at the school. Just five years ago we were 40-42%, now I'm 60%, with a decline in African American, Caucasian about 8-10%. Then once you see that, it changes the way I have to structure the school and the support services that I need to offer. If I have an influx of families coming in who don't speak the English; what am I doing as a school to meet their needs? That's another one of those reflective pieces. That comes to, do I need to have extra ESL classes or GED classes after hours? Is there support for my bilingual classes that are on the increase?

District-wide issues also are considered by principals. In this case, two middle school principals described the addition of a new middle school. This middle school

principal described her experience in reflecting and planning the process of adding another school to the district.

> Sarah: It does tend to be the more major or critical issue that we're working on. Right now we're preparing to open the fourth middle school, so that whole transition process, I'm the only one that's gone through it already. It's more a bigger or a long-term or a broader impacting thing than the day-to-day management or other related things.

Reflective Practice Strategies

The participants in the study each talked readily about the strategies used to reflect on practice. The strategies include different forms of writing, consulting with colleagues, and soliciting feedback. The principals also described their experiences in the times and places where reflective practice occurs. Two principals also described how their strategies for reflection have changed over time.

Writing

One reflective practice strategy described by the participants was writing. Writing occurred in a variety of forms including lists, journals, and notes. The creation of a to-do list was described as a way to reflect on the tasks for a particular work day. The list also creates the opportunity for review of several days of accomplishments.

> Emma: I'm a visual person. If I don't have it written down, it doesn't exist. I make my to-do list for the day or sometimes for the week. Without making a list of what I need to do today, it's like what did I do? I didn't get anything done. So I make that list, I cross it off. It's a good way to manage my day.

> Helps me see what I've accomplished. Every day or every couple of days, I review that list and see where I am.

Creating a list also can have long-term effects. Michael described his experiences of developing lists as a strategy to learn from experiences in the first year in the role:

> I don't keep a journal, I shouldn't say that; I have my palm pilot which has a daily list of activities I do and try to break it up every half hour. I've got my time planned out, or at least what I expect, and fill out what I have done today and just kind of take a look at the things I've devoted my time to and the types of decisions I made in hopes that it will help me for next year a lot more than now. Not real formal.

Other principals described their experiences with taking notes.

> Ryan: I take a lot of notes, especially the ones in the middle of the night or early morning. I don't plan it, it just happens.

For this principal, taking notes was a strategy to remember issues as they come up. For the next principal, the notes described what happened or were discussed and also include emotional aspects. Taking notes provides the opportunity to reflect accurately on the situation.

> Matthew: I'll spend time in here reviewing notes or making notes--I never throw those away. I always keep them somewhere so I have something to go back and look at. I write facts, but also reactions or things that I've done on there, so I have something to go back and review.

A number of principals described experiences of taking notes in the middle of the night. Reflecting on the note in the morning provided an opportunity for clarity. The reflection also allowed this principal to adopt a positive perspective by reflecting on the previous day.

> Lauren: In the morning I reflect back through it and sometimes you aren't thinking quite as straight as you think you are in the middle of the night . . . but before I come to work I breeze back through that and recount what's happened. I can come to work and be positive. Whatever was negative the day before, you can leave that behind and start fresh. I try to come in every day feeling new and able to try something different.

A number of principals described their experiences with journaling. Journaling was described as beneficial. One principal described her experiences with clearing her mind through journaling.

> Olivia: I found it really relaxing and it saved my head. It made space for some more things. That has been helpful.

Another principal described her positive experiences with journaling on her spiritual wellness.

> Madison: It's more of a spiritual discipline than a professional. But my professional life it spills into it quite often. That's been good for me.

Writing as a mode to clarify thinking was also described by a number of participants. Isabella described her experiences with writing to identify issues and develop strategies:

> I write, particularly when I'm muddled. Sometimes I see patterns. Once I think I've solved a problem, then I need to do a draft and I don't always know what I'm going to do with it.
>
> EM: But you write just to get it down so it's there for you?
>
> Isabella: Yes. I'm not always sure that I know what the problem is when I'm feeling unsettled. Much of my writing comes in the middle of the night. I may wake up with some solution. Writing helps me go back to sleep. Much of it is talking and much of it is really just down time. I need to do nothing for awhile so it marinates and again to see the patterns, identify the needs, and prioritize. I usually run it by somebody.

Grant writing was also described as an effective reflective practice strategy. Isabella described the grant-writing process of generating ideas and planning:

> Isabella: The grant-writing process for me is a very good tool for ongoing personal and professional growth. I write what I think, then I reread it. See how it fits. Share it with community advisor groups or groups of teachers or other administrators.
>
> EM: Do you find the grant-writing process the most powerful thing you do?
>
> Isabella: Sometimes it's really discouraging. It's a tremendous amount of effort and then no money. But other times all of that effort inspires planning that goes above and beyond. Even if the money doesn't come, the ideas I had can be good. I wouldn't do that much work just to reflect professionally if there wasn't hope of money to solve the problem.

Consulting with Colleagues

Experiences talking and sharing with colleagues were described by participants. The nature of the conversations varied. Participants described their experiences in talking with other principals and administrators, teachers, secretaries, and friends and family as a way to reflect on their practice. There is a desire on the part of some participants to engage in reflective practice with other principals.

> Olivia: I think as administrators that reflective piece is so critical. We don't do enough with it. I find myself constantly reflecting on how to do it. We need to support each other more. We need to reflect with each other more. That's a missing piece. To me, right now within the administrators, small groups.

Seeking the support of another principal was described as an effective strategy. In some ways this description is similar to how some participants described how they learn from experience by consulting with another principal.

> Isabella: When I'm second guessing myself, then I usually call for support. I can think of times when I've called a higher up or another principal to say this is what I did, what do you think?
>
> Sophia: I like to seek support from my colleagues. [Another principal] is coming over with a select group of her staff to meet with me in a round table discussion. I want to know what's working at her school. I want to know what kind of practices are going on, how are we alike.

Some participants described the opportunity to share and discuss with an assistant principal as a good strategy.

> Emma: I've been very fortunate to have my assistant principal to collaborate with. You don't realize how lonely it is until you have someone to collaborate with.

Other principals described the experience of sharing and talking with their secretaries as a helpful strategy to reflect on their practice. The secretary is a trusted colleague who can help process the events of the day and provide additional information for consideration.

> Matthew: I talk to my secretary a lot. She helps me think about what was important about that day or situations that are going on and gives me information that may assist me in my decision making.

In this case, the secretary served a role similar to an assistant principal in the opportunity to share and reflect.

> Emma: Before I had an assistant I dialogued a lot with my secretary. That's someone you hold very close to you. Use them as a sounding board.

Another principal described her experience of going outside of the school walls to talk about her experiences. The opportunities to share the burdens of the role with a trusted person were described.

> Isabella. Sometimes it's just unburdening. Probably telling stories about what's bringing me down. Even with family members. My mama, my older sons, most anyone who will listen and for whom I have respect.

Engaging with teachers about what is happening in the building was also a common theme in the experiences of the participants. Engaging with teachers was a way for the principal to gather additional information and to reflect on practices.

> Michael: Just yesterday, I could sense that the first two days of school the kids were calm and coming back [after winter break] and now they are comfortable being back so things have been very social, very talkative, you can see the anxieties of the teachers coming forward, so I made a point of going out and talking with teachers. It's one way of being reflective on how things are going by having dialogue with them. Having conversations, having dialogue and kind of using them to help me know what are some other considerations that I may not be thinking up here in the office but things that are happening out in the classroom that they may need help with.

Soliciting Feedback

Participants also described soliciting feedback from "safe" teachers, teachers the participants trust. Trust was developed through honesty, confidentiality, and credibility.

> Isabella: It may depend on what the issue is, but most often if I need a close-the-door conversation to debrief, that's a master's-level person who has a lot of experience and credibility and history of honesty.

Emma described how she solicits feedback from trusted teachers:

> You have to trust people to give you feedback. If they don't give you feedback, then you have to look for it and ask for it. I hold people close to me in a professional relationship that I know I can say "how did that go over?" Trust those resources. If you are not reflective, I don't think you learn from your experiences.

Soliciting feedback is a strategy for gathering information to help avoid making a mistake in the view of the teachers.

> Emma: So rather than making a huge mistake and having to go back and say, I really should have, . . . you kind of try to feel some of those things out. You still step in 50 million directions the wrong way and you have people tell you that you did that but you can't take it personally. Sometimes when you say people get upset, sometimes you do take that personally, but you have to be a bit more thick skinned.

Soliciting feedback from trusted a teacher is also a way to grow professionally. A trusted colleague can provide feedback on performance.

> Olivia: But then there's a separate place that I can go to, there's certain teachers on my staff that I can talk to and they will give me an honest opinion. If I did a presentation I can go there and ask did you get it? Was it ok? Did I miss something? There are a few that will give me honest feedback and genuine. Plus they'll say can we do this? Would it be a good idea if you did this . . . or if I say, I need this in a certain amount of time, is that enough time, they'll tell me.

Times and Places for Reflection

The participants described a variety of times and places for reflective practice. Most of the times and places were not in the confines of the school building or work day.

> Matthew: A lot of my reflective time about this job occurs between 5:00 and 6:30 a.m. every morning when I go to work out.

Another participant described the need to be rested and in a quiet space.

> Ryan: It does seem to happen at odd times. Sometimes in the middle of the night or early morning while I'm getting ready to go to work, because I've had the rest. There's a bit more clarity, the day has just begun, my kids aren't up yet. Things are quiet and I'm able to process a lot.

The morning was described as a time to get mentally prepared for the work day.

> Samantha: I do a lot in the morning getting ready for work, almost to the point where I'd like to shut it off. Like my mind is going 240 . . . gearing up for the day.

Participants described after-school hours as a good time for reflection.

> Madison: Often I do that thinking at night or at home or on the treadmill or whatever I'm doing.

Lauren described her experiences this way:

> At the end of the school days are probably more reflective, especially if it's been a full day of going out and seeing the teachers, an assembly, etc. I will look at how can we do that better.

Surprisingly, the middle of the night was described by some participants as a time for reflection. The experiences of some participants with middle-of-the-night writing were presented earlier.

> Sophia: Probably most of my reflective practices come in the middle of the night when I get up at 1 a.m. and read some things I'm going to give to the teachers down the road.

Leaving the school building for a conference or seminar also provided the opportunity for reflection. The content of the conference may foster reflection on practice.

> Ryan: Even conference days are good times also. Things you hear there are not necessarily related, but it's refreshing to see some of the good things going on and I come back with vibrancy and a positive attitude.

It is clear the reflecting on practice can occur in many different places and times. The principals described how the practice of being a principal enters in to their lives.

> Michael: Yeah, you definitely carry the job with you everywhere you go. Driving to work, driving home, I'll have conversations; my wife was a middle school teacher before staying at home, she entertains my conversations.

Olivia described it as a preoccupation:

> It's sporadic. I think it's so spontaneous sometimes. Sometimes I know I should be doing other things and people will say, "Are you ok?" Nothing is wrong; it's just that I'm thinking. I'm constantly thinking. It seems to kind of consume you if you let it. The job can. So there's no particular time I try not to do it during family time. I do find that the job will continue with just the thoughts. And they're just sporadic.

The trigger for reflection can come from a variety of sources. Most of the participants described a variety of times and places where they begin reflecting on their practice, but Nicholas provided an example of a trigger for the reflection:

> It happens in a lot of places. I'll be sitting in church and my pastor's giving a message and something he is talking about happens to connect to a leadership experience that I'm having right there and then at school. There was a time I was working out in the gym and I thought about something. I'm always mulling over things.

Regardless of the time and setting, it is clear that reflecting on practice is important. The experiences of thinking about practice outside of work are common to the participants in this study.

> Sarah: My reflection doesn't come immediately. I tend to do a lot of my thinking and processing of what happened outside of school. Whether it's late at night at home, early morning, or on the weekend. It's rethinking everything as it happened, what we did and making mental notes that then I may come back and talk to someone about something. It's definitely outside of here. It's never written. I'm more of a thinking person. I usually let time pass. I just learned over the years if there is an emotional component anywhere you want that to go by before you sit down and look at something. Depending on the parent or incident it may take a day or two before you're in a neutral frame of mind.

Similar to writing as a reflective strategy, a participant described prayer as a spiritual aspect to reflecting on practice. This participant described her experiences with prayer as an opportunity for reflecting on her role and work and how prayer provided strength to meet the challenges of the role.

> Isabella: Sometimes that's reading inspirational stuff. Other times it is just I flip open a Bible and read. Pray to hear what am I missing here? Ask for peace, ask for wisdom, ask for strength. Very often as I get the strength to put one step in front of the other the solutions come. But that is a habit. What I recognized is when I do have a sense of God's purpose for me and a smidge of humility that I'm just a tool, and with that comes a yieldedness that I don't have to know it all but I do have a commitment to family literacy. I'm in it for the long haul and these little bumps are not worth getting discouraged over. But I do get significantly discouraged periodically. Probably when life is not as it should be or when I don't get my way.

Change in Strategies

The way principals reflect on practice may change over time. Two principals share how the nature of their reflections has changed as they have developed more experience in the role. The principals no longer have the need to reflect on the day-to-day routine of the job. The principals tend to reflect more on longer term issues and planning.

> Sarah: Help clarify the pluses of what we did well or what was done in a positive manner. Identifying if there's anything we need to do differently next time. I will follow up if it means touching base with somebody on how something was handled or how it could be done better, or once you see the aftermath of your actions, doing it that way. There's such a huge range of things from the . . . I tend not to reflect anymore on the day-to-day situational things because by year 24, you've been there and done that for just about everything that could come up. I don't find the need to do much reflection in those areas.

> Olivia: In a different way. I can't say that I really do less now, but more focused now. When I first started, my thoughts were all over the place. All the way from the fire alarm, how that drill went, all the way to what am I doing for the school improvement day? Now I think I'm more focused. Now that I have some routines and procedures down, such as family night, open house, those things I can pretty much focus and be done and then I can reflect on some of the more obtrusive, larger issues, budget, things like that. I think it's just change and focus.

What Strategies Do Principals Use to Develop an Evolving Level of Competence?

Each of the participants was asked in the interview to describe the strategies used to develop an evolving level of competence. The principals described a range of strategies including external programs such as conferences and graduate school, reading professional literature, programs provided by the school district, networking with colleagues, reflection on practice, and analyzing strengths and weaknesses. The range of strategies is represented by the following themes: formal learning experiences, programs provided by the school district, dialogue with colleagues, professional literature, reflective practice, and analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Each of the six themes is described below.

Formal Learning Experiences

Participation in formal learning experiences was one strategy described by participants to develop the level of competence. The motivation to attend a conference varies among the participants, as do the strategies once at the conference.

This participant described what she does with new knowledge acquired at the learning experience. Learning something new and then putting it in practice is part of a larger plan-implement-reflect cycle of experiential learning.

> Samantha: I do enjoy going to workshops and conferences and seminars. I'm planning on going to the Title I conference, No Child Left Behind Conference, and also the Gifted Conference. I already went to one on time management and time efficiency kinds of things. For me, one of the strategies for me is to learn these new ideas, get the knowledge of the idea, and then to carve it into what I think would be implementation. Implement it, then step back from it and see where you need to revise it. Whether it's working or not for you. I get the knowledge of it first, then try to put in a different kind of plan. Then implement the plan, critique the plan, and then revise it or abandon it if it's not working.

Another participant described the importance of leaving the normal routine for a formal learning experience. The learning experience created the opportunity to pause and reflect.

> Isabella: There are some conferences good and some not. The process of going anywhere to learn anything even if it's just pausing to be in a meeting, that's a pause time. I've been known to do other things during meetings. Attending a meeting, conference, or a training is one more way to pause and focus.

Conference or workshop attendance can provide the opportunity to connect with other educators with common interests. Two participants described their strategy of connecting with other educators at professional conferences:

> Sarah: Most of the events I go to, if there is a second-day component, I make sure I stay overnight. If you attend together, meet with them and chat with them after the agenda and see how others applied it. In the informal time, that's when you pick up ideas and strategies not given in the seminar.

> Michael: Knowing good organizations to devote my time to that will keep me on top of things. I'm thinking of the IMSA experience. I absolutely loved

> doing that in the summertime because you are working with other educators who come together who are interested in curriculum and are looking for a better way to design curriculum to involve students, and that is an excellent opportunity to think about and understand what you are doing as a teacher, and that's worked well for me in this position.

Attending classes through graduate school is another strategy to the development of professional competence. The participants currently in graduate school had positive things to say about the experience. The graduate school experience was described similarly as professional conference in that it provided the opportunity to acquire new information, connect with other educators, and think about practice.

> Nicholas: Through my coursework. It has given me a good solid place to operate from.

Sophia, a veteran principal, shared this fact:

> I've been going to school since 1975-76, constantly taking coursework because I believe you can continue to learn more and more, then taking what I learned and giving it back in terms of presenting at conferences.

Here a participant described the cycle of learning from graduate school courses and the impact on practice.

> Michael: The coursework gave me the heads up as to what to expect, things I wouldn't have gotten otherwise, and most importantly, the coursework through Aurora University helped me to weigh from all of the information out there all the different places you can hear positive and negative things about education. It helped me to find good places to look to get my information. Rather than the word on the street from parents or just hearing from teachers, they helped direct me towards more researched material on topics and decision making and organizational change to have a better impact in the building. I think a critical part, and maybe that's why the AU courses did that for me, I was an assistant principal at the time and being in the role and doing the coursework was great. It was like a practical experience, not just a theoretical.

> You could see this, you might see that, these things could be taking place. Watch out for this grapevine. Here's a better way to do communication, rather than just talking about it. It was something I could bring to the building and implement, try and get my own feel for it. There is a fine line from what you learn from the coursework and what you bring to the coursework. Does that fit with my style? I know there's five different ways to do this, but which one works with my understanding and organization?

School District Programs

Programs provided by the school district were described by participants as strategies for developing an evolving level of competence. The supervision and support structure for principals was described as helpful. In-service programs for principals were also described. Two strategies were addressed in response to this question. The district has a system of regional superintendents. The regional superintendent meets with the principals in the region and provides feedback and evaluation.

> Michael: Regional superintendent . . . comes to meet with me once a month, one-on-one, to just go over how things are going. He has an agenda, but if there are other things more important to talk about, the agenda goes to the side and we talk. We've got a one-on-one meeting, we call that with our regional superintendent, and then once a month or so we have a regional meeting where all the principals from a region get together.

The newer principals described the meetings with the regional superintendents as a helpful strategy in the development of competence. The one-on-one meetings were described as helpful in comparison to the principal in-services.

> Madison: It's been good for me to have those one-on-one conferences with the regional administrator. Downtown developmentally, I'm not at a place where I can take what they're giving me as help just yet.

Another newer principal described how the direct feedback is helpful.

> Andrew: Have her ask me questions about what they are evaluating. Those are times when you find out what you could be doing better.

The learning needs of newer principals are important as Andrew described.

> As a first-year principal and all these things being thrown at you, I think I really need to just get into more what the district really expects from you. How to go through the proper channels to get certain things. Who do I call on certain situations? It's all about asking questions and finding the right answers. Not always about having the answer but the right place to find it.

It is important to note that the district structure was described as not helpful by some participants.

> Emma: Not a lot. We've only had three [regional meetings], if that. No, for my level of competence, they haven't done a lot for me. I'm not sure why that is. It's not like the agendas aren't prepared with thought, trying to talk about things back and forth. But, no, I can't say I have gleaned a lot from them.

The principals in the district meet together once a month. Several principals described experiences with these convenings. Andrew, a newer principal, described the value of the meeting this way:

> The principal meetings and hearing what other people are doing in their building are things that I think will make me a better principal.

Another principal expressed his desire for more professional dialogue in the meetings.

> Matthew: Principals like to see more professional discussion take place at their principal meetings. We collect information about things, engage in professional dialogue about what's going on in their own schools.

Finally, a veteran principal was less favorable about the meetings.

> Jacob: Sort of like the Rules of the Road. It's the nuts and bolts, the stuff you need to know, tools of your trade. That's my response.

Programs provided by the district for teachers were also described as a strategy for the development of competence for principals. The connection for teacher growth and the role of the principal was described by Olivia:

> We do have some staff development geared specifically for administrators. That's important to me. As I look at all the professional development activities that were coming across for teachers, they're changing the reading, and the balance literacy changing, and their doing these things. I thought wait a minute--if I'm going to be evaluating them, somebody should get me involved. If not, I have to go on my own, which I did.

The totality of the strategies provided by the district for the principals was described by Sarah, who described the structure and the purposes:

> We meet quite a bit. We're meeting more now because we're chairing this group to lead. There are actually three levels of meetings for us. The regular principals' meeting that you came to is the only time as a district we meet in addition to our in-service time. That tends to be more word absorbing than interacting. This year the district was reorganized, so we meet monthly with our regional director. The purpose is more your school initiative. Today all of my feeder principals, myself, and central office staff will meet to talk about anything, all of the things unique to our area. Now we're planning the beginning process of the transition of all the fifth graders to middle school. That meeting tends to be more helpful for the elementary principals who tend to be more of an island. Middle school principals have always met a couple of times a month to tackle anything that has to be done; we tend to do as a level, to also plan and coordinate schedules. We devote half to collaborative staff development and the other half for building base.

The district also provides support in other ways to the principals. This principal described her experience in creating a learning experience. The principal identified a need, developed a strategy for meeting the need, and implemented the strategy that worked in her building.

> Samantha: In our district we have that Just Five Clicks Program, so I had a director of test and measurements come out and walk me through about how

> you pull all of that and you can start drilling down each of those areas so you can look at your kids that are in each of those subgroups. I learned how to use that program and then pulled all of that together so that when I sat with the after-school program thing I was able to say to the teachers, let's look at this data. I forced myself to get more comfortable with it.

Dialogue with Colleagues

Dialogue with colleagues was described as a strategy to develop competence. The participants described the importance of dialogue and the opportunities for principal dialogue. Several principals specifically stressed that dialogue with other principals is a strategy to develop competence. The middle school principals are able to talk about common issues and seem to have more connections.

Three participants described the value of connecting with colleagues as a strategy in the development of professional competence. The opportunity to learn from others is not defined by role.

> Sarah: I will interact with a different group of people in the district to broaden my learning. Most of the valuable learning doesn't come from the textbook, but from networking, interaction with adults. That's what you turn around and apply.

Seeking out others both inside and outside of the district is a strategy for another participant. She added that sharing articles is an important part of the strategy.

> Sophia: I seek out people within West Aurora and East Aurora, friends in the profession. Thank goodness for e-mail. We do a lot of e-mailing of articles . . . .

The ability to seek out others as a strategy for professional learning requires an openness and vulnerability as described by Samantha.

> Now I beat myself up because I can't do that by myself. But I've decided that I think successful people really do know how to get out there and surround themselves with people that will help them. They do know the avenues that they could go to for help. I'm getting over this beating myself up attitude. Maybe these are areas where principals need more assistance with.

Dialogue with other principals was also a common theme as a strategy to develop competence in the role. This participant set principal dialogue apart from other strategies.

> Emma: To professionally better myself, I learn a lot from my colleagues. We don't do enough of that. I usually go to one conference a year. We do have principal in-services, but I get most of my value from dialoguing with other principals, finding out what they are doing.

The opportunity to engage in dialogue with principals at the same level was described as valuable.

> Abigail: It's working with peers, colleagues, as a middle school principal and a district that has two other middle schools, soon to be three others, that's a great opportunity right there because it's somebody at your own level. Our discussions, collaborations with them, is a way to gain some of that.

One principal described that the strategy of collaborating with other principals is important and described a desire for it to happen more often.

> Olivia: I think as administrators, that reflective piece is so critical. We don't do enough with it. I find myself constantly reflecting on how to do it. We need to support each other more. We need to reflect with each other more. That's a missing piece to me, right now, within the administrators, small groups.

Another participant described how dialogue with other principals helps develop competence by the sharing of strategies.

> Emma: Not enough. A lot of time on the phone. When something comes up I try to get a lot of feedback from some of my colleagues, saying, What do you think of this? Some of those didn't come from central office. Central office didn't say, hey, we think you should get together. We said, this is ridiculous, we're all trying to reinvent the wheel and we're all doing some similar, some different.

Not all participants described learning with and from others as valuable.

> Lauren: I have a really hard time in social situations. I'm better with small groups. I can do a speech in front of a lot of people, but I'm not a real big network type person.

One participant described his own strategies with self-directed learning as the strategy for developing competence.

> Jacob: By nature, since I tend to be somewhat of a lone wolf, that you notice what I didn't say. I didn't say, well I go and talk to so and so, or get in a group and do this focus group. The things that I said to you were I'll come across a book, or I'll seek out a book, it's self-directed. It's very autonomous. I think it complements my nature, except what I'm beginning to understand is just the value in what I can learn from other people.

Reading Professional Literature

A number of participants described their experiences in reading professional literature as a strategy to developing competence as a principal. One principal described the experience of reading professional literature to stay abreast of changes in the field of education.

> Olivia: Trends. I think you need to definitely stay on top of those. Be aware of what's going on. Not only in the area of professional development but

> political. You have to really follow the laws that are changing, who's making the changes and those directives. I think professional readings and research, what is working.

Another principal described reading professional literature as a strategy to examine best practices.

> Isabella: Well, I read a book for what do they say is good administrative practice. What's good 0-3 programming? What's good supervision of outside visitors? Lots of outside tools. Those things I get from peer networking or online. Reading periodicals.

Reading on targeted topics was described as a strategy for professional learning. Madison described reading on issues facing a particular building such as poverty and bilingual education:

> I find this year I seek out issue-specific reading. I wish I had someone who could give me an assigned reading list. This year I'm into the high-poverty, high-performance schools. I find that fascinating. How do they make that happen? I've also looked at some leadership books, *Leading with Soul.* Thought that was a great book. Right now I'm reading up on bilingual. What do we do with this animal we have in front of us?

Not all participants describe reading as a strategy for growth.

> Emma: I don't read any trade journals. That's something I felt guilty about the first couple of years.

Reading can also overwhelm a newer principal with too many ideas.

> Samantha: I do a lot of my professional reading at night and in the mornings and on weekends. Sometimes I feel like I'm getting too influenced by this reading, getting too twisted . . . need to take a step back.

Reflection on Practice

Reflecting on practice was described as a strategy to develop professional competence. The ability to look back on practice was described by several participants.

> Madison: Doing something once, looking at it after you've done it, and saying next time I'll do this differently. I haven't done it long enough to recognize a pattern for me.

This participant described reflecting on particular events and taking notes as a strategy to develop competence.

> Andrew: Keeping track of what I think was good. I sit down and reflect. I write it out, I have all these folders behind my desk. I write a note to the teachers. I think it's a good note about something that's going on. I keep that. We do a certain program, I write notes about it. I keep that. The next time it comes around I look back at that.

A more experienced principal described his experiences reflecting on his overall effectiveness in the role.

> Nicholas: It really is taking a reflective look . . . you take it on a different level, different scales. You take it on by experience. A very microcosmic level. You take it by what's happened overall in your interaction with the staff. You take it and reflect on what you've done for the school and where the school is overall in moving towards it. How [does] the community fit into that? You have to be able to step back and understand and see where you are going and how the needs are different now than it was a year or two ago.

Analyze Strengths and Weaknesses

The participants in the study described how they monitor their own strengths and weaknesses in order to identify areas for growth. The principals described how

they identified the issues through results, feedback, self-awareness, reflection, observation of others, feedback from teachers, etc. The identification of areas of growth can be fostered in a variety of ways. In one segment this principal described the role of reading in identifying issues through reflecting on best practices in the literature.

> Abigail: As you read through other things, effective leadership, look at different points they say, the great principals do this or that, if you reflect upon where I think my strengths are I look at other areas and then say ok, they are areas I need to focus on.

In another segment, the same principal described reflecting on the ISSLC professional standards adopted by the district as a strategy for developing competence.

> Abigail: I think continuing to look at the standards for administrators and look at the areas and continuing to reflect. Make judgments on where you think your strengths are and by talking to other people, where they think your strengths are, and those areas that are weaker, continue to strengthen those.

The identification of areas of growth can also come from uncertainty. This principal described her experiences seeking learning experiences related to areas of need.

> Samantha: For me, I look at the areas that make me anxious. Then I know there's a reason why I'm anxious and usually it's because I don't know enough about it. That's an area I need to address.

Reflective practice as a strategy for the development of competence is extended by the following participant. Nicholas described how he reflects on the

needs of the school and his own strengths and weaknesses as a way to identify areas of growth to meet the needs of the building

> However, in terms of how competence and being effective for the building requires your ability to step back and say now where is this building at now? What are its needs now? Where are my strengths and weaknesses towards meeting those needs and what do I have to do to take it to the next level?

The importance of having strategies to develop competence in the role is reinforced by this participant. She described her need to keep growing in the role.

> Isabella: I would have to say my confidence is often fleeting. I just think I'm doing a good job and I get another good idea. Overall, I think I'm good enough. I don't very often feel I can just sit back and wallow in my success. There's so much to do and the priorities continually shift.

This participant described how he selected strategies for improving his competence level. He described that he selects the strategy based on the needs of the moment.

> Jacob: I don't have it all figured out, no educator has it all figured out. So it's that philosophical umbrella that you try to project and I guess I believe it. People come up and do research that you look at and it's like going to the vegetable market. You pick and choose. If it's useful and if it makes sense to you, where you are in your own growth, and according to your own experiences, your own context and it has value. Share it with others. Create that community of learners as Goodlad likes to call it. I can't single out a particular area, it's everything.

How Do Principals Monitor Their Understanding, Practice, and the Development of Competence?

Each participant was asked in the interview to describe how he/she monitors understanding, practice, and the development of practice. The emphasis was not on

how competence is developed, as it was in the previous section, but on monitoring performance and growth. Some important individual general comments set the stage for the established themes. One participant described her experience with learning from experience and reflecting on her work, but she noted the limits on monitoring performance.

> Lauren: I'm not sure that I do. You move through each day and hope that what you learned the day before helps you make better decisions. As you think back on it, you can make connections, but as it's happening, I'm not sure I'm actually thinking about it. You can't force it. It flows through you.

Some of the participants described how they monitor their own performance and effectiveness. One participant shared that it is easier to pay attention to other factors than her own performance.

> Madison: I'm not very good at that. I can monitor academic effectiveness and climate effectiveness of this building. But in terms of my effectiveness, I can't do that yet. I worked with my staff to develop an action plan and I refer to that often.

Another participant described the ease with which he reflects on his leadership.

> Nicholas: Not to beat a dead horse, but you have to be reflective on who you are. It doesn't help if you have delusions of grandeur. If you're not willing to be honest with yourself and look at the signs of your leadership, you leave your mark on the building within a five- to seven-year time period.

Confidence in one's abilities also enters into to monitoring performance and growth.

> Isabella: I would have to say my confidence is often fleeting. I just think I'm doing a good job and I get another good idea. Overall, I think I'm good enough. I don't very often feel I can just sit back and wallow in my success. There's so much to do and the priorities continually shift.

The ability to set goals for professional growth was described by participants as well. Nicholas described a range of goals for the year and the importance of having goals as a way to monitor professional practice and growth:

> I have personal goals as a principal which are just the basic, i.e., are the staff needs being met? What are the policies here? How do we make decisions? How do we communicate? What is important communication? Where is when a teacher should be involved in decision making? When is it just an administrative decision to be made? Recognizing those elements are my goals this year. Setting those goals are so important. Otherwise you become a bit more reactionary to the daily occurrences than having a direction yourself.

However, another principal described her self-perceived weakness of not being a goal setter and the impact of state processes in handing goals to a local school.

> Emma: A weakness of mine is a goal-setting person. I do my to-do list, I call myself on the phone, but those are day-to-day management things. They are not longitudinally I want to be able to do this. Fortunately or unfortunately our goals are pretty much defined by ISAP. You need to meet expectations, or we're sticking you on the list. Some of those goals, you look at the performance descriptors, the state's standards, . . . the state hands you some of the goals you need to accomplish. You take that list and work on that. I know what I want to do but I don't sit down and make lists of goals. Having a weakness of not being a goal setter, that's something I need to work on.

Six themes emerged in the analysis of how principals monitor their understanding, practice, and competence. The participants described evidence of success as one way to monitor understanding, practice, and competence. Other themes in monitoring performance are gathering feedback, monitoring the school community, monitoring school climate, monitoring classroom instruction, and monitoring interpersonal interactions.

Evidence of Success

Another theme in the experiences of the participants in monitoring performance and growth was looking for evidence of success in general terms. This principal described his experience of monitoring how students and teachers are doing through informal observation.

> Michael: So staying on top of that-- but without the feedback and dialogue-- being out in the building seeing how smoothly things are going, do the teachers look anxious, do students look overtaxed, or do they look like they are ready to learn. So several informal observations--probably the biggest thing that I can see is the lunch time.

Another principal described his experience monitoring results and reactions of people.

> Jacob: Results and reactions of people. It's the easy answer. Staff evaluations, or development of school improvement plans, or its decisions brought on by student discipline. It's just bottom-line results. Also the reactions of more people to what you have done or set in motion or facilitated.

This participant described her experiences monitoring teacher morale and monitoring implementation of the school improvement plan. How well things are going in the building is evidence of the principal's performance.

> Abigail: If I find staff is getting frustrated or this isn't getting done, or I'm getting a lot of negative feedback, then I'm not communicating well enough for people to understand. I would then make some changes. I think just taking each area like that and looking at it . . . if we have school improvement, then everyone is going to do reading strategies in content areas. We started that in-service in the beginning, when I go around to the classrooms and talking to teachers, during evaluation or in general. If I don't see that being done, then I need to do something more to make them complete that initiative. Observations, looking for evidence helps.

Gathering Feedback

Participants described experiences gathering feedback from others as a strategy to monitor competence in the role. One principal described his experience in gathering feedback from a variety of sources including students, parents, and teachers.

> Matthew: By feedback mostly, by staying in communication with the people who are most impacted by the decisions I make. Talk to teachers, students, parents. Meeting with parents before the PTA meeting. I rely on secretaries a lot. Not asking them to break confidence with staff but what is the "buzz" on this . . . in terms of decision making.

Another principal described the importance of trust as a precondition to soliciting feedback.

> Emma: You have to trust people to give you feedback. If they don't give you feedback, then you have to look for it and ask for it. I hold people close to me, in a professional relationship that I know I can say "how did that go over?" Trust those resources.

Asking for feedback requires an openness to receive the feedback. One participant described her experience asking teachers for formal feedback on performance.

> Madison: It was a bit scary. I asked them to rate me; we picked the bottom five for me to work on improving. We went through and talked about it.

Another principal described the experience of conducting a formal assessment of performance through survey feedback.

> Sarah: I have done some formal assessments in the past. I have been in a workshop that gave staff perceptions of strengths and areas of improvement. Periodically I've done more informal. Sometimes it's just talking to people. You always get your feedback in what comes back to you from outside the building. People will say, oh I heard you were working on something.

Dialogue with teachers was described by participants as a strategy for monitoring performance. Using conversations with teachers to gather feedback is one way to gather feedback from staff. This participant acknowledged the limitations of a single school leader to deliver programs and the dependence on the teachers who are delivering the instruction.

> Emma: I watch how things are running in the building. I know that the way things are run in the building is because of the teachers. I can say all I want about, oh, I can run this, and I'm in charge of that, doesn't mean anything if you have teachers that aren't with you. I dialogue a lot with the teachers about how things are going. This door is always open. It's very open. Even if it's a criticism, people feel safe in coming to me to discuss it.

The conversation with the teachers informed the principal about how well things are going in the building,

> Michael: Again, a dialogue with the staff and having genuine conversation. Did that work well? It's not to separate me from the decision; I don't want them to or asking them to critique how good do you feel I am, but in small steps, How well did this work? And having that dialogue and ask them to give genuine answers about how that worked. So having the dialogue . . . .

Conversations with teachers also provided insight into the classroom. The conversation enables the principal to learn more about classroom practice.

> Ryan: I dialogue with the teachers and learn what they are doing. That allows me to critique that certain teachers are good for this job and to move this building along in the reading initiative.

The importance of discussions with teachers is described by the following principal. He described his experience in demonstrating that the staff is doing the best they can.

> Andrew: I don't know that I can exactly pinpoint how well I'm doing. It's feedback. Teachers will say we did this and this, it was a good idea. Whether it's a good idea or not is up to me and my teachers because it's our building and we have to do it the best we can. Even though the district is driving the state funds, we have to prove that it's making a difference.

Paying attention to students and parents is a strategy of monitoring performance. Three experiences from participants illustrated how principals pay attention to students and parent feedback. Being visible to students and parents is one strategy to monitor what is happening.

> Michael: I make a point of every day going down to the crosswalk to be a crossing guard at the front circle. It is amazing the number of people that stop and talk with me about their own little issues--it started with how pickup and dropoff works and what they are used to seeing, it's now changing to stop and talk about what's happening in the classroom or some kind of social things between the kids, their friends.

One participant described the importance of monitoring whether the students are happy with the school.

> Andrew: When you have parents come in and give opinions. The biggest is the kids. When I see the kids are happy, I see test results or assessments that kids are getting better. That's the strongest thing that tells you are doing a good job with them. Not a lot of discipline cases. The teachers will share their thoughts with you. They will come more with concerns and want to know what we can do about it.

Jacob described his experiences interacting with students as a way to monitor performance and enjoy the role of principal:

> Whether it's a little kindergartner coming up and giving you a hug or a fifth grader who's been a little gnarly, you know that your relationship with that student that day is important. Allow yourself to savor what's going on, or it will be gone. Slow down and savor.

In addition to gathering feedback and looking for evidence, the participants described other strategies for monitoring understanding, performance, and competence. The principals described their experience monitoring the school community, school climate, the nature of instruction, and interpersonal communication as ways to monitor performance.

Monitor the School Community

The participants described understanding the needs of the community as a way to monitor their own performance and competence. The participants described specific situations where they were paying attention to the community the school serves and their own performance in ensuring the needs of the community are being met. In this case, the participant described changes in community demographics and the need for programmatic changes.

> Olivia: The demographics--Hispanics have increased in population at the school. Just five years ago we were 40-42%, now I'm 60%. With a decline in African American, Caucasian about 8-10%. Then once you see that, it changes the way I have to structure the school and the support services . . . .

This participant described her experiences understanding the literacy needs of students by understanding the needs of low-income families.

> Madison: They haven't been read to. They haven't had exposure. Mom and Dad are trying . . . , poverty is a significant issue here. Even if we don't fill out a free and reduced lunch form, because we're worried we're not legal, it's there. People are so busy trying to make a living, they don't have time to read or have books in their home. Kids aren't talked too, so they come in behind in language. Often my families aren't literate themselves.

Another participant described her experience understanding the home lives of her students in the context of the special purposes of her school as a resource for the community.

> Isabella: The majority of our families are low income, undereducated, and are not aware of developmental needs of children or of community resources to meet family needs. Many are just barely tolerant of their children. They have chaotic home lives and don't see schools as places that are helpful. The first goal is to help parents trust us and then to use that relationship to help them do things that their child understands. Normal child development begins to use strategies that promote children's success and readiness for school.
>
> EM: What I hear is that within a chaotic household [is] a lack of awareness of student developmental needs, that going to a preschool program or coming to school on a regular basis are not necessarily good values.
>
> Isabella: Right. Or even having conversations with children, reading to children, playing games, training children to be civilized. All of those things that help children to be ready for when they come to school in kindergarten.

The needs of each school building vary and change over time. This principal described the interface of school tradition and the changing needs of the community. The principal monitored her own performance and effectiveness in meeting the changing needs of the school community.

> Sophia: It does have a lot of rich traditions. But within those rich traditions some of the issues that we [have] come up as the school evolved, with more and more children that need supplemental services changing. Changing the attitudes, trying to find out what's working, what's not working, and moving the faculty and the parents into that change mode.

The expectations of the school community also impact how the principal monitors performance. In this case, the principal described the high expectations of a group of parents.

> Jacob: Or to turn situations around like last year we had a group of parents who were like hot to trot--we aren't doing enough for our kids. What they really wanted was--they wanted a school that was like North Shore with 29 property taxes and the demographics didn't match up and so to turn a potentially volatile situation into an advantage with the school--what we did, we said, I'm really glad that you're bringing up this issue and you're raising some great points. But here's the reality, use the parameters, the resources, and the limits that we have to operate under and you can be valuable support to us instead of adversarial; it's work with me, and we appointed them as a committee. We met a couple of different times; they did three to four initiatives. It really helped our school. So it's that ability to problem solve, to work with people is a strength.

Monitor School Climate

The principals also described their experiences of monitoring school climate as a strategy to monitor practice and performance. School climate in these descriptions is an indicator of effectiveness of the principal. If school climate is not good, then the principals can intervene. Monitoring school climate is a way for the principal to monitor personal performance. In this description, the principal shared the desire for an open and sharing climate.

> Emma: You can walk into a building and you get a feeling. I'm sure you walked in this morning and cried "chaos" . . . not even organized chaos, just chaos. But one of the things we hear back a lot is that the climate of this building seems very open, very welcoming, people are very friendly. We all own each other's kids. It's not just, This is my class, don't discipline anybody in my class because this is mine. There's a lot of sharing and ownership in all of the kids in this building.

The principal can intervene in school climate by making changes. Olivia described her experience in implementing a change within the building in an effort to improve school climate:

> So what I did was try to assess and bring in my background knowledge when I was a teacher running in here and talking to them as well as listening to them. Not directly so much talking to them but just listening, listening to the conversations going on. What needs to be changed, and I try to use that to my advantage and say, they've wanted a change for a long time, this would be a positive thing for me to do. So I started with those things that needed to be changed and went slowly that way and start to ease yourself in and work your way.

This principal described monitoring the school climate to see why staff morale was low. She shared that the principal cannot control events within the school but how the principal responds to the events may impact everyone.

> Abigail: I'll take the climate one. There was a point, last year, morale seemed down. I had talked with some staff, you could feel it anyway. I looked back to things that had been happening and what I'd been doing. I tried to see was there something different going on at that time? Had I changed some things? Through those conversations and discussions I made some changes that have brought things back. As I looked at it, there were some events that took place not necessarily that I had control of, but you do have control in how you deal with things. That impacts everyone else.

Monitor Classroom Instruction

Participants in the study shared their perspectives on the role of the principal as an instructional leader. An instructional leader is described as fostering innovation, improving the performance of teachers, encouraging professional dialogue, and leading school improvements. In this section, the principals shared the descriptions of the phenomena of monitoring performance and growth as an instructional leader.

This principal described his experiences in monitoring his performance in relation to a reading initiative. He described his growth as an instructional leader by

learning about the district's reading program, setting a direction for the building, and supporting the teachers.

> Ryan: I'd like to think my knowledge base has grown considerably in the last couple of years. I've been working on taking charge of the reading initiative that the district and state focus on. I feel that this year especially, going back to reflection, I feel in a short period of time I have been able to lead the building in the right direction and set up professional growth opportunities and be right there with them in those professional growth opportunities. They believe I am concerned about reading and their professional development. I give them opportunities to grow. I try to find out what their strengths are and have them bring those strengths to the building. I'm taking a look at what my staff has to offer, what the district is looking at as far as their main focus; my main focus is through my school improvement plan and try to find opportunities to make it all work.

One principal described the role of the principal as supporting the teachers and ensuring alignment to a vision for the school.

> Andrew: As a principal of classroom teachers, I have to work on how can I help them. What can I do to make their job easier? What can I do to make sure we're going in the right direction? To make sure everyone is on board with doing the right things we need to do for our students?

Supporting teacher innovation and experimentation is another aspect of instructional leadership. Olivia described the practice of supporting and encouraging teachers to take risks as a way to monitor whether her own practice is growing:

> I'll have teachers come to me and say, "What do you think will happen if I do this?" or "if I try this program?" . . . I'm always challenging them to think outside the box. Try it. . . . Bring it to life and then you let me know how it went. "Are you sure I can do it?" Sure, go ahead, take it . . . take the course, see what happens, what did you learn? Bring it back and apply it to your class. And then reflect.

A measure of effectiveness of instructional leadership is productive conversation about student achievement. This principal described his experience in monitoring teacher dialogue about student achievement test results.

> Michael: Those are nice when you can get to those kind of things, but when you get to the daily basis its conversation, dialogue you've got to talk about . . . what I'm really impressed about with this staff is their professional dialogue . . . it's easy to close a lounge door and have negative conversations about all the woes and troubles and I don't hear that as much as I have in other places. Here I hear more constructive conversations. Not just because I'm there, I will walk in a room and catch tidbits of people's conversations and they are talking about data-driven decision making; I just passed out some of our own CTBS testing results. I didn't say a word about them. I just put the results in their boxes and by the end of the day I had clusters of people probably three clusters throughout the building independent just having dialogue about those scores. So I would jump in and have some conversation and leave. All types of issues being professionally discussed and making sure that that level of discussion continues. I do that on a daily basis.

Another way to monitor performance is to monitor performance in the absence of the principal. This participant described that she is not involved in every activity in the school, yet she monitors the practice of others.

> Sarah: I've always shared with staff that if we're going to get everything done that we want to do, everyone has to contribute. We've had a lot of initiatives. But once we as a building make a commitment to something, for example, our Character Counts, we're a large Character Counts school. I facilitated the exploration and discussion and piloting, but once that was something that emerged from the staff, that yes, this is a good fit with middle school, yes, it's a good fit with what we want to do, the entire program, the regular running of it, the implementation is all staff run. So Character Counts has a committee that meets monthly. They organize and plan everything. They put together schedules for activities. All the details are done by them. If you would look at our monthly meetings calendar, it's filled with things. Other than the building leadership team, I am not a component of anything. That's it. People would want me to be a component of more, but I've stepped out pretty much. Is there another administrator on each one? Yes. But I am not a visible component of the planning or implementing of anything in this building. It's

> hard for principals to do. We want to be involved. We want to make sure it happens right.

Ultimately, the principal is accountable for the learning achievement of the students in the school. This participant described her experience in entering a new building and leading the school improvement process. The principal monitored her own effectiveness in moving the school towards a state-approved plan.

> Sophia: I think I got sucked into some of the things going on. I tell myself I won't do that again. I will look at this differently. The should've, could've, would've . . . I would have done some things differently in the first two months. I didn't come in making change right away. Obviously in a school like this, where we're on warning, that we had to make change immediately. They didn't have a school improvement plan. We had to write a state improvement plan via state rubric and there was the thinking, "The state will just go away" . . . so part of it they thought was my agenda. This is required and we will all work together. In my reflection, if I were to be assigned another school there would be a list of things I would do differently. But there are a list of things that I should have moved quicker on, even if it caused confrontation.

Interpersonal Communication

The final theme in monitoring understanding, practice, and the development of professional competence is the ability to relate, communicate, and monitor others. The principals described their experiences in monitoring their performance by paying attention to interpersonal interactions and communication.

> Jacob: Also the reactions of more people to what you have done or set in motion or facilitated. I think the older I get, the more important, relatively speaking, is to become more people oriented. Because when you've got down the mechanics, the management, what really becomes more important is people.

Effective leadership is described as dependent on the ability to monitor others' reactions. This principal monitored his practice by monitoring the how others are doing.

> Nicholas: To be a leader, you have to be attuned to people. You have to have some sensitivity to people's feelings, thoughts, reactions. You can't be an effective leader that moves an organization forward if you can't connect with people, understand them, relate to them, understand their body language, or understand their feelings and thoughts. Because the organization is made up of people. All those are typically what men are lacking, that touchy, feely side of being able to understand where people are coming from.

This participant described her entry into the building as a new principal. She described listening as a strategy to understanding what was happening in the building.

> Emma: I really just sat back and watched what was already going on in the building. Started real slowly making relationships with the teachers and parents and kids. I think I started out by being a good listener, because the reason there was a vacancy was not because something was wrong here, so it wasn't like I was coming in to save the day or to make all these changes. So that first year I spent a lot of time getting to know people and listening to them and trying to let them get to know who I was before I attempt to make changes. So I think being a good listener as well as being [a] highly visible principal. I try to be in the hallways a lot, in the classrooms, calling parents on the phone, just trying to be available and visible so that they would come to me and there would be a trust that was built so that I could make some changes and some progress when that time came.

How Do Principals Integrate New Understandings into Practice?

Each of the participants was asked, "How do you integrate new understandings into practice?" The purpose and intent of this question were to understand how the principals integrate new information, knowledge, or skills into

their own professional practice. The majority of the responses described the principals' experiences integrating new understanding and practices into the building, into the practice of others. I did not notice the patterns of responses until well into the interview schedule, so the question was not reworded for the remaining interviews, although additional probes were added in the later interviews.

One principal described her experience integrating new understanding into her practice.

> Madison: I decide how important it is to me. How much energy will I put into it? I determine if I will make it happen, to expend the energy.

Integration of new understanding depends on the importance and the perceived pay-off. Another principal's description was related to learning from experience.

> Lauren: To learn something, you just have to do it. I might go to a conference and then just try it. Within that trial, you can extrapolate the pieces that are good and not so good. I learn by doing. So integration of new understanding included putting it in practice and evaluation of the results.

One principal described her experiences with her motivation for learning something new and integrating into practice.

> Samantha: A lot of times what happens is I think the motivation comes because some need is there. There could be all of these things out there, these wonderful things and opportunities and workshops and seminars and plans, things like that. But unless you internalize it, you have a need that's a void within you, chewing away in you; I don't think you see the opportunity out there. That internal need has to exist first before you can bring it to the forefront. It's kind of like you don't know what you don't know. Last year I knew that I wanted to get better with analyzing data. Just looking at piles of test scores made me nervous. I didn't want to touch it. How do you process all this into meaningful pieces, so that it makes sense and you can present it to staff so that it makes sense and workable? For me, I look at the areas that

I expected more responses about these kinds of experiences, principals integrating new understanding by trial and error, learning from experience, establishing priority areas, etc. However, the themes within this description are more directed at the principal learning in order to advance the practice of others. The themes in this description include the lead learner phenomenon, the principal offering innovative ideas, and the principal fostering risk taking and experimentation.

Principal as the Lead Learner

The lead learner phenomenon is when the principal learns something new and internalizes it well enough to share it with others. In this description the goal of the learning was not to improve the principal's personal practice or repertoire; it was to further the practice with others. In the following statement, the principal described the urgency to share his new understanding to help improve their practice:

> Matthew: So I attended a few conferences, did some informal learning on my own. I started working with our NC director to do these "mechanical Mondays," where I'd pick up all these little tricks and then every Monday I'd invite staff who wanted to learn a new trick to come in. As soon as I acquire new skills or knowledge, I begin sharing it. I get it out there. Making people aware that I'm trying to support them so they can use that new resource.

Within this theme a principal described the experience of learning to build skills and understanding, but reinforced the utility of the practice within the building. The principal took the lead in learning in order to share it and related resources with teachers.

The principal took the lead in learning in order to share it and related resources with teachers.

> Ryan: It gives me more insight and knowledge base to make better decisions in the long run. If it's a technology conference, I try to include my finding with the staff and my building. With gifted ed, I tried to come up with supplemental material and enrichment activities I had gotten at the conference. Some conferences have more impact than others. I go and try to see how it could fit into this building realistically.

The lead learner phenomenon was also described not only in terms of urgency but also based on need. The principal described identifying areas of need within teacher practice.

> Michael: There's different sides to that issue. How drastically different is this new idea than what we have been doing. If it's drastically different we start with a, Why do I need to consider this? I need to consider this because maybe this will lead to more thoughtful decisions on teachers or it will change the way they do things to align more with the focus we have in the building. There I'll start with where are the biggest problems that are occurring that will lead me to want to have this new change and working with just a grade level or working with just two people at that grade level to see how that process goes, and how drastically different is it from what we already do. Working with a small step.

Principal Offering Innovative Ideas

A second theme within the phenomenon of integrating new understanding into practice was the principal's role in offering new ideas for teacher consideration. Again this description was more about the teachers integrating new practices as a result of the principal's suggestion and leadership. This may speak to how deeply engrained the role is in the professional practice of the principal. One principal

described the experience of using a resource to pose questions about the current practices in the building.

> Isabella: My typical strategy is to share a complete document with people and say how are we doing? Give them time to think about it and write about it. Some of that questioning, how do you think we're doing? How do you know what we're doing? Particularly if I am trying to guide them to focus on one area more. That visioning. If we were really effective, what would it look like? What are doable next steps? What are the barriers? What help do you need from me?

Another principal described the experience in asking questions about the integration of a new direction. She described the many leadership questions to be considered. The primary issue described was the importance of including staff in the development and implementation process.

> Olivia: I think you have to know which direction you're going in. You have to be grounded in it and know enough about it. But I think you have to bring the staff along with if it's something you're going to be implementing that's going to affect other people. You need to have them included. Not all the time. There are those times you need to make the decision. But if it's going to affect everybody and everybody has a part in it, they need to be brought along with your vision of why you're doing it. How it's going to be done, who's going to be doing it. How it's going to monitored. And how it's going to be evaluated. I do think you bring those people along with you. We have a building leadership team that I will float things out to them. "Ok, what do you guys think about this, and if the majority think it stinks" . . . I'll say let's talk about it.

Another principal described his experiences differentiating when to include teachers in decision making and the importance of including staff in decisions about implementation of new ideas. The issue seemed to be the description of the process of including others in the implementation of new ideas.

> Nicholas: Depends on how big or far reaching is its impact. If it's something really minor, then just do it. I think teachers expect that. Teachers don't expect to be consulted and conferenced for every little decision. If it's a new idea that has a great level of impact and changes, then I say you have to throw it out there and see what happens with it. By just talking about it, tossing it over. Talk about it with some teachers that you know won't be totally reactionary. Bounce it off, compare it to the reading and research that you've done and compare with the needs of the building. Is it really fulfilling a need? What is its purpose? You do a lot of fact finding about how people will think about it.

Another principal described the process she used to bring an idea to her staff. The described process includes informal communication, illustration of practice in another setting, conversation with selected staff, and formal communication with the building leadership team.

> Madison: I usually bring it back and I talk about it. I bounce it off of other people. What do you think about this? This school district is doing this . . . or this one's doing the same thing we are, they made great progress. I strategically go around my building and talk about what I saw. Then I find more information about it and share that. I bring it to my BLT. We talk programmatically. We decide if we will do it.

Another principal expressed her caution in implementing new ideas. She described the importance of going slowly to tailor the idea to the specific context.

> Emma: If you hear of a good idea, you have to figure out how it works in your building. These buildings are all very different. The staff are very different. And your partnership will look completely different at different schools. You can't standardize something like a partnership or collaboration. That will put you in the sink hole. So to come up with new ideas, you need to approach it slowly and figure out how it will work in your building. Do your background research and pull people in and plant a seed. You need to start small. If you come in like gangbusters, both guns going, two years later they weren't around. You're coming into a situation where for the most part you have an established parents, kids, and staff. If it's going well, to come in and do that is suicide. If it's not going well and you come in and change everything, they

> may think everything is fine - you've just totally negated everything they are doing. If you don't have personnel or personality skills you are going to stink.

Fostering Experimentation

A different theme in the description of the principal's experience in integrating new practices was the process of fostering experimentation. This less experienced principal described offering a new idea for consideration but not requiring adoption.

> Andrew: I usually bring it to our staff meetings. I tell them what I have in mind and it is accepted either way. Then we go with it. We try it. I never demand we are going to do something. I try to get a feeling of what they may respond to. I'll talk with others to determine the outcome.

A veteran principal offered his experience in trying out a new idea by taking a risk and making decisions based on the results of the experience.

> Jacob: You just try it out if it appears to fit in the context. We don't know, only one way to find out. It's kind of fun to try out. Give permission to yourself and staff to take risks; that's action research. Then make a decision as to what extent this was valuable.

The responses to the question about how principals integrate new knowledge or skills took an unexpected turn. Most principals answered in relation to how to implement new programs or ideas into the school, not how to integrate new knowledge or skill into their practice. The descriptions of the principal as the lead learner, the catalyst for others' learning, and fostering experimentation are illustrative of their experiences.

How Do Principals Reframe Their Understandings Based on Experiences?

The final interview question was, "How do you reframe your understandings based on experiences?" The intent of this question was to expose how principals engage in critical reflection. Five themes emerged in this area. One theme is that the participants reframed understanding through the acquisition of new information. The role of core values and beliefs is another theme related to reframing understanding. Personal and professional impact is a description of how principals reframe understanding. The fourth theme is openness to change, and the fifth theme that describes how principals reframe understanding is through beliefs about students and parents.

New Information and Learning

One theme in the descriptions of the phenomena of reframing understanding was reframing based on new learning. Within this theme, principals described reframing their understanding based on experiences with personal interactions, programmatic issues, and learning from experience. In the first case, the principal described her experiences of reframing her beliefs about others.

> Samantha: I'm experiencing this right now. I have decided that we are all working from whatever inner core we are drawing from. We each create our own reality every day. I've decided that my reality may not be somebody else's reality. I'm trying to accept that the way I see things, my perception of things, could be very different than the way somebody else is perceiving this.

> Not that mine is right and they are wrong, but what I'm trying to do is respect that. I am trying to accept the fact that I need to respect that.

In the next description, the principal described her experiences in evaluating one program within the school and comparing it to another program. In that evaluation, she described how her view of the first program was reshaped through deep examination.

> Madison: I hadn't thought about that too much. For example, with the bilingual, my original thought was this program doesn't work, this ESL program does work. Let's do it this way. But since that knee-jerk response, I've been reading a lot about what effective, bilingual instruction looks like. My opinion about that has changed. I'm looking at a different model instead of just pulling fully out of bilingual and doing just the ESL program. Sometimes it's through reading, sometimes through talking to others, sometimes watching what other people do.

The description above included learning from evaluation and professional reading about a topic. The next description included a reflection by a principal on how staff meetings have changed over time. His conception of the meetings changed based on his learning from experience about the needs of the staff.

> Matthew: I go back to the first year we were open and the staff meetings monthly. If I look at the agenda from any one of those meetings, versus the agenda I put together for staff meetings now, they're considerably different. Part of that is out of necessity. We were a new school, a lot of nuts and bolts, logistical things that needed to be discussed as a staff. We didn't spend a lot of time as a whole group about teaching and learning. It was more talking about walking through the hallway or getting out for recess. Now when I think about the biggest change, that is making more efficient use of our professional time, talking more about school improvement processes, failures in classrooms, helping struggling readers, that would be an example.

Core Beliefs and Values

A second theme in the description of how principals reframe understanding based on experience was the centrality of core beliefs and values. As a result of some experiences, a principal described that his core beliefs do not change.

> Nicholas: Certain levels of my values have shifted, but those are not core essential values from operating; it's more of values from the peripheral.

Reflection on core values was described by another principal.

> Michael: It is difficult, how do you learn to change what you think and know because that gets down to the root of the fundamentals of what you believe is right and good; there's that value system and what you think is right and good for students, for staff--that's a point of reflection that people rarely get to.

Another principal described how reflecting on his core beliefs in relation to the new understanding will determine the extent to which the new understanding is integrated in practice.

> Matthew: I revisit those things that are most important to me. Think again about personally about what my values and my beliefs are. Determine if this new thinking or information impacts my beliefs. Then go think about my beliefs, what's nonnegotiable, what's a belief that is not so rooted in actually who I am or what my practice is, and compare this new acquired information with what I hold to be true.

Finally, a principal described how the conflict of core values and experience can be resolved. The conflict can be dismissed by not reflecting on the values, or the principal can be open to the conflict and use it as an opportunity.

> Jacob: It's an opportunity of growth, isn't it? If you find dissonance between your particular beliefs and values and what the world is smacking you in the face with, that's an opportunity for growth. You can either minimize the dissonance in some different ways so you can experience it and use it as an

> opportunity for self-growth or professional growth. To the extent you do that depends on what's going on.

Personal and Professional Impact

Some of the descriptions in response to the question of reframing understandings based on experience addressed the personal and professional impact of the experience. The participants described the impact of the situation and how understanding was reframed. Sophia described the reframing of her understanding of the impact of a school in a student's life and the ability to address societal issues:

> There was a period of time where I thought I could fix it all. If we just did these things, the domino effect would be that their kids would come into the classroom all ready. I'm more idealistic. I still am. I believe that we can do more than we're doing but we need more a whole village doing it instead of just me trying to lead the charge. At times, I feel that I'm not making a difference. You look for other resources. There are things that are doable and I have control over. There are things that I do not. While in my school I have control over it. I should do whatever I can. But outside of school I don't have control over. I need to stop beating myself up. Understanding that my values are different from the values that are out there and not every kid is going to bed with a story, snack, hug and kiss . . . there's also a great conflict between the institution of school and home.

This participant described the impact of experiences that address personal feelings about the role. The ability to get over the personal feelings was described as important as a way to not get stuck.

> Lauren: You have to be able to let go. It's was very hard for me to admit that I made a mistake. To let go of what was not working and to be able to actually move on with what you've learned. Now, I don't take it personally and realize that something didn't work and I need to move on from it. Don't beat yourself up on it when you make a mistake. That's how I keep myself growing and learning.

The principal described the ability to reframe understanding through experiences that caused personal discomfort. This participant described her experience with feeling inadequate in the role and how reflecting on her purpose helped her regain confidence and courage.

> Isabella: I know that I do that. I have had stages in my career when I could recognize that lack of fit or discomfort or a feeling of inadequacy. All of those can motivate something. I don't know to what I can attribute it other than thinking, talking people. That's how we live. That's metacognition. I do have a habit of pausing, consciously setting aside time. Sometimes that's reading inspirational stuff. Other times it is just I flip open a Bible and read. Pray to hear what am I missing here? Ask for peace, ask for wisdom, strength. Very often as I get the strength to put one step in front of the other the solutions come. But that is a habit. What I recognized is when I do have a sense of God's purpose for me, a smidgeon of humility that I'm just a tool. With that comes a yieldedness that I don't have to know it all, but I do have a commitment to family literacy. I'm in it for the long haul and these little bumps are not worth getting discouraged over. But I do get significantly discouraged periodically. Probably when life is not as it should be or when I don't get my way.

Openness to Change

Another theme within this question of reframing understanding was the principal's openness to change. The following participant described his openness to reconsidering their existing perspective. In this description, the participant shared his willingness to suspend judgment.

> Ryan: Take PTA . . . I struggle with PTA. It is a vibrant, totally motivated, big-budget organization. Sometimes the things they will come to me with I don't understand how they could come up with that. I sometimes don't see the value in what they want to do. I don't see where it fits in the scheme of achievement around here. At the same time, I may not see it right away, but eventually, if things change, it may fit.

Another participant described openness to changing his current views, but he described his need for proof that the new way is better.

> Andrew: When it challenges it and I start to think I may need to change, I take a look at that and am willing to re-evaluate my previous decision. I want proof that it will be better for the children of our building, that it will work.

Openness to change can also bring into question authority in the role. The principal described her openness to not being "right all the time." But she also described the importance of being able to support and defend the action as the building leader.

> Olivia: Sometimes it's just a reaction, can be defensive. They are challenging my thoughts; wait a minute, I'm the principal. I'm supposed to be right. I have had to take a step back and say maybe you need to listen to this. You're not right all the time. So I've learned to do that. I'll sit with people and I'll actually give them praise for having a varying point of view. That's interesting that you say it that way. Sometimes I don't change my frame of thoughts. I may not have thought about it that way, now that I see this in a different light. I have no problem with changing in that area if it is the best--I may have to know more about that, help me to understand, etc. A lot of times that works and then there are times when I will disagree with you and we'll have to leave it at that. We'll have to agree to disagree. If they're going on something that as building administrator I'm not comfortable with, I sometimes take that risk. I have done that . . . let's try it . . . let's see. If I do say it won't work, and it doesn't, I don't go out and tell them, "I told you so," . . . that has not happened a lot. If I am going to change my view and actually take action on something, I have to have a certain amount of understanding and comfort with it. If I was just to go out on a limb and trying everything and going which way the wind blows, you open yourself up to chaos.

The openness to change was described differently by another participant. The principal described how he questioned himself about openness and reflected on his practice of considering other perspectives.

> Michael: That's not always easy. I try to be sensitive myself to be open to change but I see that more in others, when I go to ask things to be done differently, I see a lot of trouble with people trying to reframe. I think about, am I learning and growing or is this how I naturally do things and just continue to do them that way? Do I only find ideas and strategies to do differently because they fit with how I do things now, am I open? I'd like to think I'm fairly open; I think I do a pretty good job reframing my understanding just from what I've seen.

Beliefs About Students and Parents

A specific area described by the participants in response to reframing understanding based on experiences was the beliefs about students and parents. Consistent with previous descriptions, a participant described the willingness to reframe her understanding if it is more reflective of what is best for students.

> Abigail: I have to step back from my own beliefs and keep open and hear all the feedback and input and then together with what research is telling us, what practice has told us, then do what's best for the students. That may not always be what I have believed is easiest.

Another participant described his experience with reframing his understanding of younger students through the experience of working in an elementary school, after experiences at the middle school level.

> Matthew: One thing that has changed is a better understanding of elementary students. My first year my expectations were a bit too high for this age level. I changed my approach for K-5. I also think that being strict with those kids wasn't too bad, and they know that I hold high standards for them and will carry out consequences (although I'm open with consequences).

Another participant described her experiences learning about different cultures and issues of poverty. She described how she reframed her understanding of the experiences of families based on hearing their stories.

> Madison: I have learned a great deal of the cultural experiences of those kids and how that impacts them. The poverty part wasn't hard to understand for me, it was the different world view that my families have. The drugs and violence and how that impacts kids is hard. I still struggle with what I hear sometimes and have to maintain relationships with those families.

This participant described how her understanding of student learning needs changed as a result of experience. She reframed her understanding of the need for structure in the classroom to meet the needs of some students.

> Sophia: Early on in the open classroom model, we thought kids could do and be successful . . . they can't. They need a very scripted learning environment. They need teachers who are the very best in teaching and content area. In the Head Start program, there are families who are needy.

A number of participants described the specific challenges and evolving needs of bilingual education and bilingual students. The experiences with bilingual students lead to reframing of the needs of these learners. One principal described the struggle of placing students in a bilingual program. The struggle emerged from beliefs about what is best for the student.

> Emma: I have concerns with bilingual in general. I have encouraged parents who have just come from Mexico with a little kindergartner or first grader; they don't like the idea of if their child qualifies for bilingual that they would go to another building. So I've talked about the advantages of being in an English-speaking classroom from the get go. . . . I think that children that speak Spanish and come to school should be in English-speaking classrooms and learn English and they can continue their culture and their language at home because many of their parents still speak Spanish and have not learned English. They can maintain their culture just like we all maintain our cultures

> in our family units at home. One of my passions that I have to figure out where it belongs is the fact that, yes, I know we will have a bilingual program next year. I do think those kids need a transition plan. You can't just completely do immersion. But I don't completely agree with the process. I have a hard time with that. The way I've painted it for my staff, cause I have to keep my own biases to myself, is to give the advantages of it. I will have a little bit of input and action that I can do here. Philosophically and politically I am having a hard time with bilingual education. I don't think it's black and white. I think each kid is an individual; I'm not sure you can do that with a program. It's not bilingual's fault.

The quality of the bilingual program was described by another participant. She described her process of understanding the program and then reframing her understanding of the needs of the program by comparing it to the English as a Second Language program.

> Madison: It took me about a year to figure out what they are doing and what they are supposed to be doing. Then I got the manual and read that. It doesn't really match what I'm seeing inside the classroom. Once I understood the program, I now have a pretty good handle on it. I wasn't happy with it. I thought it was terrible. The quality of the teachers was significantly lower than the quality of the teachers everywhere else because we hire Type 29 teachers, which means they have a degree in something. That doesn't mean anything good. You got a degree in engineering and could be teaching. The curriculum wasn't there until this year when we got Houghton-Mifflin. They didn't have books they could use. They were just punting. I looked at those kids as my most at risk. I have another program in my building ESL. . . . We give them a different program. I saw their progress last year was huge. The progress of my bilingual kids was minimal. When we're exiting them out of bilingual, we're putting them in the testing year; they are scoring two to three years below. They are in the program three years and coming out of it testing two years below. I was uncomfortable with it. My process is I think about it, think about it, and then I talk to somebody.

How Do Principals Question Themselves in Practice?

One of the original research questions was, "How do principals question themselves in practice?" This research question was not translated into a specific interview question. Throughout the previous descriptions, I have included descriptions of how the participants question themselves in practice.

The critical incidents also illustrated how principals question themselves in practice. The incidents showed that principals think about some situations carefully and deeply. The principals questioned the information they have about a situation and they questioned the basis for decision making.

Descriptions of the phenomenon of reflective practice also illustrated how principals question themselves in practice. In this case, the principal shared her questions as a way to reflect on an experience.

> Abigail: It's always questioning. Did I, was that meeting important? Did I waste people's time? Did I have what I needed? Was I prepared? Did I communicate well enough? Was I fair, consistent, honest?

View of the Role

Throughout the interview process, principals described their views of the role of the principal. While this is not in response to a particular research question, the descriptions provided by the participants are rich and insightful. Ryan described the learning curve of becoming a principal:

> You have no idea what being a principal is all about until you sit in the seat. Part of the learning curve is the experiences in the role.

Another participant described the learning curve.

> Matthew: It's reaffirmed to me that learning to become a good principal requires you to be in that position. You can never become a good principal until you are a principal.

Yet another participant described her self-doubt about serving in the role.

> Samantha: Sometimes I don't know how fulfilling this really is for me with what I'm doing. I taught for 23 years. At that time I did some change. And I did that: changed grade levels, schools, assistant principal, etc. I don't know if this is just the beginning principalship feelings that people have. I hope this is normal. I question if this is my calling. I'm not sure how effective I really am doing this.

The issue of autonomy was one theme in the participants' descriptions of the role. One participant described the autonomy of site-based management and the power of decentralization.

> Lauren: To some extent you're on your own as far as separation from the powers that be. Here we're tied by special mandates and laws. I don't think of it as my building or that I'm alone in it. I feel that it's their building and I'm just here to help pull the loose ends together. What's nice is being able to have some site-based management and have the trust of your board and superintendent. It's helpful. I truly understand and know my staff better than the Board of Education.

The autonomous role of the elementary principal was described by one participant as a "lone wolf."

> Jacob: I have a bias that I think elementary principals in particular are lone wolves. We like our autonomy. I think people, personality-wise, are attracted to the elementary principals more so than middle or high school because you tend in high school to have assistant principals as a team. Elementary principals, by and large, are lone wolves and I think that people with those

> types of personalities are attracted to that type of position and vice versa. As an elementary principal, you do have an awful lot of autonomy.

The issue of autonomy was connected to the theme of loneliness described by other participants. This elementary principal described the nature of the role and not receiving a lot of feedback.

> Olivia: Many, many times. That pressure is behind you. Yes, everybody can give input and do it, but when the chips fall where they may, your name is on the dotted line. A lot of times there is some very confidential things that you really can't share with people. Just the nature of human beings to share things, and a lot of that you hold internally. It can be a lonely and thankless place. So you really have to look within to get your kudos. I'm finding that a lot. Before I used to wonder am I doing ok? Nobody told me I'm doing alright. The longer you stay in the field, I think you definitely don't get some "ah-has" until the third year. It can be lonely.

Loneliness was described by another participant as a "heavy heart." The weight of the role and the special needs of her building contributed to the feeling of isolation.

> Isabella: I experienced it initially as more of a heavy heart than I do now. I can tell when I'm feeling lonely or alone. This is my 11th year as the principal, my 15th in these programs. It was harder before I realized it was a normal abnormality.

The addition of an assistant principal in an elementary school can change the dynamic of loneliness experienced by a principal.

> Emma: I've been very fortunate to have my assistant principal to collaborate with. You don't realize how lonely it is until you have someone to collaborate with.

However, the feeling of loneliness is not universal. Another principal described that she felt well connected to the district.

> Sophia: I don't feel isolated in terms of the district. I feel pretty connected; with the new regionalizing we're meeting even more frequently. We're a lot closer.

Another theme in the participants' descriptions of the role of the principal was the challenge of balancing roles. This participant described his role as responsible for everything in the building but the balance of ensuring that each staff member fulfills his/her role.

> Jacob: One of the things that operates I believe is the ability to let go. As the principal, there's one administrator in this building. That's me. Everything ultimately is going to fall on my shoulders, but you have to balance that sense of responsibility and the fact that everything is going to come to you; it's my phone that is ultimately going to ring, people going to cross my threshold, where with if you hire good people, competent people, and you support them, and you provide the guidance and the structures for them, then let them do their job.

The same principal continued with describing the Superman mentality of the role and how to avoid doing everything in the building.

> Jacob: The other thing is . . . see the Superman up there? That's there to remind me that I do not have to do everything. The story goes, the administrator who wants to do everything for everybody will end up being in the office on the weekend because he has spent all week doing everybody else's work and he now has to get his own done. Hire competent people, trust them, and you provide the support and the structures they need to do their jobs. Will they make mistakes? Yes. Will they sometimes do things not like you? Yes, but you can learn from it. Because you know what, sometimes people come up with better ways of doing things. You can't do everything for everybody. It may be your building, you may be the principal. If you want your staff to continue to grow, you need to empower them and let go, let them do their jobs.

Delegation was another factor in the balance of roles in the building. As Michael said:

> I think there is a role for the administrator and it's not just to delegate, but to delegate wisely. That's the trick to it.

A veteran principal described her experiences in ensuring everything runs well without doing it herself.

> Sarah: My staff, they're leaders. I won't do their job for them and I do delegate. They take active roles in the things that they do. Within the building, things function and I am not a part of everything that takes place in this building. Things function quite independently and then after people do their research, etc., they come bounce things off of me.

The principal's voice and authority were factors in the balance of roles within the building. One principal described his experience in using his authority and influence to push an agenda or issue.

> Ryan: I'm only one of 12 people involved. In any case, in my position I have some authority and influence. I used that authority and influence to direct this. There are times when I do push forward to get what I think is best. There may be resistance; my track record is pretty good.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND OUTCOMES

Summary of the Study

This study was concerned with school principals as learners and how principals learn from experiences in professional practice. The study examined how principals learn while on the job. The results of the study illustrated how principals construct meaning and make sense of their experiences within the context of practice. The meaning-making process draws upon the theory base of situated cognition, constructivist learning, transformative learning, and reflective practice.

Each participant was interviewed by the researcher. The purpose of the interview was to gather detailed examples of how the principal engaged in reflective practice. The researcher conducted nondirective, open-ended interviews. The use of phenomenological research methods in this study was intended to focus on the meaning of lived experience of school principals as they used reflective strategies to further professional learning and solve problems.

The focus of the interview was on the experience of reflective practice for the purpose of describing and understanding the meaning of reflective practice for the participants. The interviews sought detailed, precise, and specific accounts of the

experiences without interpretation. The purpose of such interviews was to allow the essence of reflective practice to emerge.

Fifteen open-ended and unstructured interviews were conducted to gather descriptions of the experiences of principals with reflective practice, monitoring and developing performance, and learning from experiences. The results of the analysis were the common elements of the phenomena and an accurate description of the experiences.

The study described how principals regulate their learning and how they monitor their understanding, learning, and practice. One element of expertise is superior self-monitoring skills and self-knowledge. This study illustrated the ways principals monitor themselves in practice. The ability to acquire, use, and generate knowledge to solve problems is important to school leadership. Principals must exercise judgment as a form of professional practice.

How principals integrate knowledge and learning into daily practice is a facet in the development of expertise. The integration of new knowledge enables principals to develop deeper and richer thought patterns. The abilities to reflect on experience and to self-regulate are central to the meaning-making processes of principals. The outcome of the meaning-making processes is to become more effective in learning from experiences so that principals can be more effective in professional practice.

One of the primary findings of this study was the process of personal and professional meaning making. Other key findings of this study included the processes of regulating professional learning, the role of context in learning, and the need and desire for participation in communities of practice.

Synthesized General Description

The final analysis in this study is a synthesized general description of the structure of the experiences of the participants. The descriptions of the participants have been analyzed for common elements. The common elements are presented as the descriptive interpretation of the patterns. The general description is intended to explain what is going on in the experiences of the participants. The underlying structures of the meaning of the experiences of the participants can be described in three broad areas. The three areas are how principals make sense of their experiences, the principals as learners, and how principals exercise judgment in professional practice.

Meaning Making

The principals in this study described how they make sense of their experiences and how they make meaning for themselves. The principals make sense of experiences by reflecting on practice and learning from experiences.

The principals described openness to learning from experiences and in fact described learning by doing as a central way to develop competence. Participants

described learning from experiences by using past experiences to inform current practice. Inherent in this description was the openness to learn from the past and the willingness to try something new. The principals were not content to repeat past strategies; rather, they would try different strategies in an attempt to get a different result in a similar situation.

The principals paid attention to others and they described the many ways they gather feedback as a way to learn from experiences. The principals gathered feedback from trusted sources including key individuals and groups. They also described how they monitor the responses of others as a way to make sense of experiences. Principals monitored their performance through the reactions of and impact on students, parents, and staff. The reactions of others informed the principal of the success of the current experience. The principals held on to these reactions as visceral reminders of how well a situation worked. The key description was that principals tend to work to gather enough information so that they feel confident that they understand the current situation. The principals described consulting with others as a way to learn from experiences and to make sense of a current situation. Consulting with others was another way to gather input, this time by asking for guidance on specific issues or problems. One principal's comments sum it up well.

> Jacob: You live through a phenomenon and you are attuned to your own reaction, inner states, and you self-monitor as you go through the phenomena. And you note the consequences both external from the outside world and internal from the phenomenological perspective as you're living it. You note the reactions of other people and act the results of your actions, parted [sic] and reflect upon it. And based upon all those different variables, hopefully

> you'll learn something from it. If it was a positive experience and I'm responding in a very general way, put that in the bank and say, I made some good decisions there, I handled it well. Pretty effective. Store it. On the other hand, if things don't go well, according to how you reacted to it internally or other people, or the ostensible results, had a bad outcome, you also learn from that. Because you look back upon that and say, you know I didn't handle that very well, but we learn from that and not make that same mistake again.

One of the questions that emerged in this study was, Why is feedback and the reactions of others so important in the meaning-making process of principals? The participants described the importance of gathering feedback, monitoring the reactions of stakeholders, and consulting with other principals. One of the answers to this question resided in context of the role of the principal. The role of the principal is both highly interactive but also isolated. The importance of context will be described later.

The principals described how they used processes of reflection to make meaning and sense of their experiences. The participants described that being reflective was part of who they are, pervasive, "second nature," and necessary to be effective in the role. Reflective practice was the way the principals think about their work, their performance, and question themselves in practice. The principals routinely think about their work and question how well the experience went. The primary description of reflective practice was looking back on situations and considering them. In some cases, the principals described how they reflected in action as a way to monitor the situation and make adjustments.

The principals also used reflective strategies to consider their own performance. Principals think back and evaluate their own performance and their leadership. Reflecting on professional performance was a way for the principals to create meaning about what is working and places to professionally grow. Principals used reflective strategies to make sense of experiences, evaluate their own performance, and question themselves. The principals are willing to think back through situations characterized as mistakes and figure out how to make the situation better in the future. They asked themselves what they did well, how they could improve, and how to lead more effectively.

Reflecting on practice can be an emotional experience for the principals. For some, reflection was the ability to detach, step back, and look at the situation. For others, the process can lead to self-doubt and heightened self-criticism. Principals described some of these experiences as worry, anxiety, and uncertainty.

The reflective practice strategies described by this group of participants was consistent with the literature base. The participants described how they used writing in a variety of forms to reflect. The participants described talking and sharing with colleagues as a strategy along with soliciting feedback. Of most interest are the variety of times and places the principals reflect on their practice as a way to create meaning.

Similarly, the principals were asked to describe the strategies to develop an evolving level of competence. The responses to this question were also consistent

with the literature on the professional learning strategies utilized by principals. The principals participated in formal learning experiences such as conferences and graduate school. Such opportunities allowed the principals to acquire new information, connect with others, and think about practice. The programs provided by the district met the needs of some of the principals. For some, it provided similar opportunities as those described for professional conferences. The principals also indicate that professional literature was important to develop an evolving level of competence.

Networking with colleagues was also described as a strategy toward the development of competence. This is not a surprise since consulting with other principals was described as a way in which principals learn from experience and make sense of their experiences. The importance and desire to consult with other principals were repeated in a variety of ways in this study.

One of the interview questions was posed to explore how the participants critically reflect on their experiences. The idea was to understand how principals consider their meaning structures and assumptions. The principals provided a few descriptions of how they reframed their understanding as a result of reflecting on their core values, introspection on professional impact, and thinking about particular issues such as poverty, bilingual education, and beliefs about students and parents. There is some evidence in this study of transformative learning experiences through critical incidents and reflection on key issues.

Principal as Learner

The principals in this study described themselves as learners. The abilities to reflect and self-regulate learning emerged as key to the participants. The ability to engage in reflection as a way to exercise judgment, plan, and make decisions will be described later.

The examination of critical incidents informed the nature of the principals as learners. The incidents became critical not only because of the situation for the student, staff, and parent but also for the principal. The incidents fostered introspection into Who am I? and How do I want to do this work? Jacob described how "some of the nice guyness has been washed away." The incidents were critical because they illustrated the principal's values, strengths, and vulnerabilities.

The principals monitored their own strengths and weaknesses as a strategy to identify areas for growth. They identified the issues through their results, feedback from others, and reflection on their practice. The principals described how they reflect on their own abilities as a result of feedback, reading best practices, and observing others. Monitoring strengths and weaknesses was an indicator of self-awareness.

The participants also were asked to describe how they monitor their understanding, practice, and development of competence. The principals described that they evaluate their own performance through evidence of success, gathering feedback, and relating to and monitoring others' reactions. The principals also

described that they monitor themselves by paying attention to school climate and the surrounding school community. Some of the descriptions here are consistent with the other descriptions of how the principals make sense of their experiences, feedback, and feelings.

The principals described their view of the role of the principal. These descriptions were important because they got at the context in which the principal practices and learns. The issues of autonomy, loneliness, and responsibility all emerged in the descriptions. Further, when principals were asked how they integrate new understanding into practice, the participants focused on the principal's role as instructional leader. The principal was a lead learner by going first in learning new ideas. The principal fostered innovative ideas and experimentation with others. The principal's view of the role informed who the adults are as learners.

Professional Judgment

The third component of the generalized description was how principals exercise judgment in professional practice. The principals described a number of ways they exercise judgment. The participants described how they reflected on decisions to be made, including planning decisions. A significant description was how the principals think through decisions to be made; reflect as a way to consider the decision; and reflect on the process, impact, and outcome of the decision. For some,

reflection and the process of decision making were synonymous. Taking the time to reflect and think through decisions was described as desirable.

Principals reflected on the impact of the decisions they make. The nature of the role and competent performance made it important to be able to articulate how and why decisions were made. Principals reflected on the impact of the decisions as well as the decision-making process. As schools become more democratic, principals must be mindful of both support and opposition. The principals were also descriptive of the importance of consulting with others in exercising judgments.

Principals reflected on their practice in planning processes as a form of decision making. Planning in the principalship was described as a form of decision making. The principals made decisions about their vision for the school, the direction of initiatives, school improvement planning, changes in the school community, and district-wide issues. The principals reflected on the circumstances and then made decisions on the plan to move forward.

Principals described the importance of anticipatory reflection. In this mode, the principal took the time to consider options, plan, and prioritize. Anticipatory reflection can be considered the process of reflecting on decisions at the "front end."

In response to the critical incident question, principals described how they learned from critical incidents. One of the major themes was how the principal exercised judgment in the face of conflicting demands to act in the best interest of the

child. The judgment was critical because of the competing pressures and influences that created the incident.

The areas of exercising judgment, the principal as a learner, and the meaning-making processes of principals will be further developed into a model of professional learning after a return to the literature.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the data and the synthesized description of the structure of the experiences of the participants, it is important to return to the literature to inform the findings thematically. Based on the findings, a number of contributions of the literature could not be foreseen initially. In this section, new elements will be introduced based on the findings. A new concept map with the added subject areas that arise from the findings is proposed. The new concepts are more complex than originally anticipated. The literature will be discussed through the unique relationship to the role of the principal.

The areas of the literature that could not be anticipated are a deeper exploration of the meaning-making processes, the role of context in the construction of meaning, the importance of self-regulated learning, and exercising judgment in profession practice. Because of the data, the researcher now has greater insights into each of these areas. The intent is to illustrate how these new insights concerning the literature are aligned with the data analysis.

Construction of Meaning

Daley (2000) presented a model of learning in continuing professional education that expands on a model presented by Cervero (1988). Cervero's model described how professionals develop technical and practical knowledge. The components of Cervero's model included cognitive psychology, reflective practice, and expertise. Daley's expansion of the model included the addition of the context of practice with professional learning. Daley (2001) described the importance of context: "Knowledge became meaningful for professional practice through these constructivist learning processes and through the professional's perceptions of the nature of their professional work" (p. 51). This study informs both Cervero's and Daley's models by describing how a group of professionals made sense of their experiences within the context of practice.

The components of Daley's model of learning in continuing professional education included knowledge construction in professional practice. In her model, knowledge construction occurs through two processes: constructivist learning and transformative learning. Daley described constructivist learning and situated cognition as processes of developing meaning as a result of experiences. Daley also included transformative learning in the model and distinguishes meaning-making processes from knowledge construction as a result of critical reflection on assumptions. This study described how principals construct meaning through

experience and learning. To do this, the components of Daley's (2000) Model of Learning in Continuing Professional Education will be modified (see Figure 2).

Different perspectives on cognition were informative to this study. Cognitive psychology is one component of the theory of expertise that this study aims to further. Fenwick (2000) and Daley (2000) offer two different views of cognition. For the purposes of this study, cognition included situated cognition, constructivist learning, and transformative learning. Knowledge is developed through situated cognition, constructivist learning, and transformative learning. In Figure 2, the cognitive psychology component of the models is labeled "reflective construction of meaning." The aim is to describe the professional ways of knowing through which principals learn from experience, situated in practice.

The principals in this study described how they create knowledge and personally make meaning. They described how they developed meaning from experiences through reflection. This process is consistent with the constructivist learning processes of reflection, critical reflection, and situated cognition. Each of the principals described how they regularly reflected on their work. The object of the reflection tended to be their own performance, the way things are done, and particular problems or issues.

The descriptions of the experiences of the principals in this study were highly emotional. This surprised the researcher and was not anticipated in the literature. The principals were deeply expressive of their emotions. The high emotional content

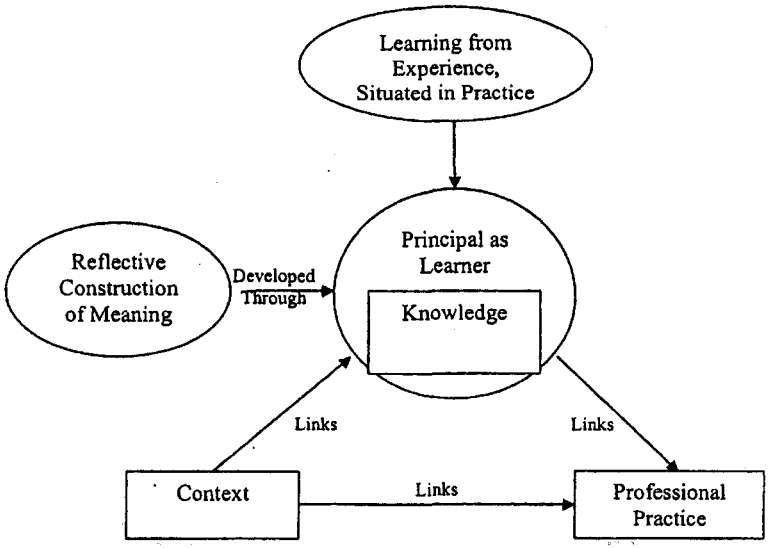

Figure 2. Model of How Principals Learn from Experience.

indicated that the meaning-making process is not entirely cognitive. Emotional processes are a part of the meaning-making process. The theories of expertise and literature on reflective practice do not adequately address the role of emotion in learning. This study illustrated that reflective construction of meaning is an emotional process, that the intuitive sense of challenge described in reflection-in-action is inclusive of feelings, and that learning is social and therefore inclusive of emotions. This finding is not theoretically supported and needs to be addressed.

Fenwick (2000) explained the role of emotion in the interference perspective of cognition. She described the role of the unconscious mind on the perception of experiences. "Experiential learning is thus coming to tolerate one's own conflicting desires while recovering the selves that are repressed from our terror of full self-knowledge" (p. 252). While none of the participants expressed "terror" in their experiences, a number of participants did express emotional conflict. There is no way to know the impact of emotion on self-perceptions. Fenwick continued, "The general learning process is crafting the self through everyday strategies of coping with and coming to understand what is suggested in these conflicts" (p. 251).

This study illustrated that the principalship is an emotionally laden role. The role of the unconscious can help account for the role of emotion. Researchers such as Britzman (1998) addressed the role of emotion in learning from a psychoanalytical perspective. She wrote, "[T]here can be no theory of learning without a theory of love and hate in learning. . . . The force of learning is analogous to the force of affect and

therefore charged with libidinal energy" (p. 53). Britzman (1998) argued that learning emerges from conflict. This study described how principals learned from conflict. This body of research can help account for the role of emotion as illustrated in this study.

Cheetham and Chivers (1998) presented an effort to bring together theories of reflective practice with a model of professional competence. The resulting model of professional competence included reflection as a metacompetency. A metacompetency "enables people to go beyond their other competencies, to analyze, modify and develop them. At the same time, reflection has a particularly unique position, acting as sort of 'gate-keeper' to certain kinds of development" (p. 274). It is clear that reflection was also a metacompetency for the principals in this study. When each of the principals was asked how they learn from experiences, they described processes of looking back on the experiences in a reflective mode.

The phenomenon of reflection was explored at length in this study. The study indicated that all of the participants regularly engaged in reflection-on-practice. The principals were conscious of their use of reflection and were able to provide examples of both the development of meaning and reflective strategies. The principals' descriptions were much more about reflection-on-practice than reflection-in-practice, although both were described. The principals in this group described much more looking back on their practice in a relatively unstructured manner. The principals described the importance of reflection to understand situations and to learn from

experiences. A common theme was the use of reflective strategies to solve problems and make decisions.

Cheetham and Chivers (1998) posed the importance of self-perception in the development of professional competence. "Self-perception of competence was seen as being assisted by feedback from others" (p. 269). In this study, the importance of feedback in a variety of forms was repeated over and over. The feedback of others was a critical influence in the self-perception of competence of the principals in this study. They continued in saying that self-perception of outcomes ideally leads to reflection. The principals clearly described that they reflected on the feedback offered and also sought out feedback as the fuel for reflection.

Given the nature and purposes of this study, the researcher was not able to differentiate the descriptions of the phenomena in such a way to align with different theories of cognition. It was clear that the principals engaged in meaning-making processes that were best described as constructivist learning. The principals created knowledge through constructivist processes. The principals engaged in reflection on experiences and developed meaning through experiences. The result was knowledge creation and personal meaning making. The reflective processes were primarily on experiences, but there was some evidence of critical reflection on meaning and belief structures.

The principals described the processes of learning from experiences. To distinguish situated cognition from reflective construction of meaning, a line would

have to be drawn to differentiate learning from experience and learning in experience. The researcher cannot draw that line as a result of the descriptions of the phenomenon. The principals learned as a result of the interactions of self and context. "The basic premise is that knowledge is situated, that is, it is the product both of the activity being undertaken as well as the context and the culture in which the activity is accomplished. The underlying significance of situated cognition is that it affects views of how learning is accomplished" (Prestine & LeGrand, 1991, p. 68). The principals' knowledge was shaped by context.

Brookfield (1998) critiqued the celebration of learning from experiences in adult education. He expressed a number of concerns about adults learning from experiences. Brookfield contended that not all adults have rich experiences from which to learn, that experience is not necessarily fruitful, and experience can be a barrier to learning. He added that not all adults have the capacity to learn from experiences:

> Here I am defining learning from experiences as the capacity to unearth assumptions that have framed our thought and action and then subject these assumptions to research and critical inquiry by reviewing them through different lens. Reflecting critically on experience in this way should help us to take more informed actions in the future. (p. 128)

He also argued that experiences are constructed by the individual in response to events.

The results of this study provide great evidence that the principals are doing critical reflection on experiences, not just reflection on experiences. There is no

evidence that the participants in this study "descend into an uncritical, celebratory swapping of war stories and anecdotes in which all stories possess equal value, merit and significance" (Brookfield, 1998, p. 130). The principals engaged in critical analysis of experiences by reflecting on and critically analyzing the experiences in an effort to understand themselves and their practice better. The principals are learners with the power to learn and shape learning environments.

The principals described their experiences in reporting and analyzing their experiences. But they also described the extent to which they gathered feedback to ensure that they had an accurate picture of the experience. While some distortion of the experience may be present, there is enough feedback to ensure accuracy. The principals would benefit from participation in group dialogue or other strategies. "In these groups people use each other as critical mirrors. They come to realize the value of their own experiences, they take a critical perspective on these, and they learn how to use this reflection to help them deal with whatever problems they face" (Brookfield, 1998, p. 136). There is ample evidence in this study that the principals used critical reflection on experiences to deal with the challenges of the role.

Context

Context is central to the understanding of human learning. According to Wilson (1993), learning and knowing are structured by the individual's interactions with others, with the environment and elements of the environment. Wilson describes

the role of context in three ways. First, learning and thinking are social activities. Second, learning and thinking are dependent on the tools within the situation. And third, the individual's interaction with the environment influences human thinking. Wilson indicated that "cognition is a social activity that incorporates the mind, body, the activity, and the ingredients of the setting in a complex interactive and recursive manner" (p. 72).

According to Kerka (1997), the concept of situated learning is embedded in constructivism and describes learning in a social context. Involvement in authentic activities and cognitive apprenticeships are congruent with constructivist practices. Constructivism posits that individuals seek to make sense of the world by integrating new information within existing mental models and reconciling discrepant events by reconceptualizing prior knowledge. Questioning, inquiry, and reflection characterize a constructivist approach.

The context of practice shapes the knowledge that is constructed. Cheetham and Chivers (1998) described the importance of both the context of work and the work environment to the development of professional competence. Daley (2002) described the four characteristics of context that shape learning in professional practice. Each of the four characteristics will be connected to the descriptions of the phenomena and the role of the principal.

Allegiance to the profession is the first characteristic of context. Daley (2002) described the allegiance as a result of an occupational community. "An occupational

community is unique in that it features shared characteristics that make people in it more similar to other members of the occupational community than to people in the rest of the organization in which they work" (p. 80).

When the local school is viewed as the organization, then it is clear that the principal is more similar by role to other principals than to others in the school. Daley (2002) continued in the description that self-image of the role is socially constructed within the community. The daily interactions of the principals in this study reinforced the socially constructed image of the role. As Nicholas shared about including teachers in decision making, the role of the principal is negotiated and understood with the teachers:

> Depends on how big or far reaching is its impact. If it's something really minor, then just do it. I think teachers expect that. Teachers don't expect to be consulted and conferenced for every little decision. If it's a new idea that has a great level of impact and changes, then I say you have to throw it out there and see what happens with it. By just talking about it, tossing it over. Talk about it with some teachers that you know won't be totally reactionary. Bounce it off, compare it to the reading and research that you've done, and compare with the needs of the building. Is it really fulfilling a need? What is its purpose? You do a lot of fact finding about how people will think about it.

The role of the principal as the lead learner, early adopter, and fosterer of innovation and experimentation was a socially constructed role.

The principals also described the desire and need to network with other principals. Since there is only one principal in a building, they had to seek out colleagues to consult. As Olivia indicated, consulting with other principals is important:

> I do want to say I do have a close-knit group of principal friends. There are probably three that I could pick up the phone and just call and let me bounce this off of you. I'm struggling with this, I can't decide, I'm on the fence, or what do you think? That can vary from just going outside, is it too cold, are you guys going out? All the way to "Man, we just had our principals' meeting what do you think of that topic we were talking about." I'm torn here with some issues with "No Child Left Behind." There are some issues there. A lot of it comes to dollars and cents. Okay, is it worth it . . . do I do this? Or do I do what's morally right? A lot of times it's nice, there's a small group I can call on, which I appreciate. We do that for each other.

Some of the principals were more successful than others in meeting their own needs of establishing networks of peers. Likewise, the differing views of the value of the district-developed programs speak to the extent to which the principal may identify with their professional community.

The nature of the professional work is the second characteristic. Daley (2002) indicated, "Two aspects of work that seem to drive learning in most professions are the needs of the client and the services that the professional provides" (p. 82). The principal is responsible for the learning of children and the leadership of a professional staff. The needs of these two groups, in addition to the expectations of the parents and the community, drive the learning of principals. The descriptions of the critical incidents are indicative of the needs of the clients as central to the professional work of principals. The changing demands of schools from the state and federal governments drive the learning needs of the principals. The changing needs of the learners including bilingual education, special education, and changing economic and demographics all drive the learning needs of the principals. The principals work to meet the needs and the demands drive the learning needs of the principals.

Leithwood et al. (1992) and Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) described school leadership as problem solving. The nature of the role of the principal as problem solver was evident in the descriptions of the phenomenon of learning from experiences. The principals described their experiences in making decisions and thinking through issues as a way to improve the situation for a student, teacher, or the school.

The school principal is a leader in establishing the school culture. Daley (2002) indicated that variations in culture influence the learning in professional practice. This could not be more true in schools. Ryan described how the needs of the teachers and the students in his school impacted his professional learning and the school culture:

> I'd like to think my knowledge base has grown considerably in the last couple of years. I've been working on taking charge of the reading initiative that the district and state focus on. I feel that this year, especially, going back to reflection, I feel in a short period of time I have been able to lead the building in the right direction and set up professional growth opportunities and be right there with them in those professional growth opportunities. They believe I am concerned about reading and their professional development.

The school culture impacts the learning of all members of the school community including students, teachers, staff, and the principal. The principals described the importance of school community and school climate in monitoring their performance and development of competence. Further, the principals described their roles in developing school cultures for teachers that foster risk taking, experimentation, and innovation.

According to Daley (2002), the level of independence and autonomy of the professional influences the learning. The principals in this study worked in a largely decentralized school district and therefore had a high degree of autonomy and independence. The participants described the need to seek support of other principals. The principals talked about the desire to connect with other principals who share the same kinds of issues and programs. They have the autonomy to address issues in the way they see fit but also wanted the feedback and assurance that they are on the right track.

None of the participants talked about trying to find ways around school district or state issues. They did talk about seeking professional learning to meet the needs of students. They also talked about how they learned to be more effective in planning programs such as staff development sessions. They have the autonomy to design programs within the financial and time constraints of the context.

Some of the participants described loneliness and isolation of the role. The high degree of autonomy and independence had an emotional downside for some principals. The weight of the educational experience of all of the students seems to fall on one person's shoulders.

Self-Regulation

Eraut (1994) described control knowledge as guiding one's thinking and learning. Control knowledge is essential to principals. Control knowledge is

comprised of self-knowledge and self-management. Self-knowledge is inclusive of knowledge of one's own knowledge and skills, including strengths and weaknesses. Control is exercised when the principals demonstrate in practice when and how to use their knowledge and skills.

Self-knowledge is inclusive of self-awareness. Self-awareness is acquired through reflection and feedback. The principals in this study described iterative processes of developing self-awareness through reflection and feedback.

Figure 3 illustrates the cycle of developing self-awareness through feedback and reflection. Feedback from the work situation is the fuel for self-reflection. So, self-awareness was developed through reflection on performance and reflection on the feedback about performance, which resulted in greater self-awareness.

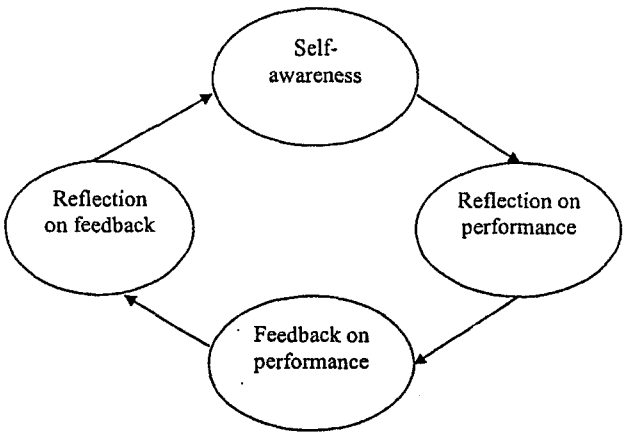

Figure 3. Cycle of Development of Self-Awareness in the Context of Practice.

Self-management is the second component of control knowledge. According to Eraut (1994), self-management is inclusive of the organization of time, selection of activities, and managing time for self-development and learning. Self-management is the ability to manage and direct the roles and priorities of the profession. Principals require self-management knowledge and skills given the autonomous nature of the role and the demands of decision making, problem solving, and leadership.

According to Smith (2001), based on her work with accounting professionals, self-regulated learning is essential to professionals. "The goal of self-regulated learning is updating skills, acquiring new knowledge, and solving new problems throughout a professional career" (p. 664). Smith presented a self-regulation learning model. Self-motivation is at the center of the model given the primacy of the learner's intrinsic need to learn and understand. The three remaining components of the model are self-regulatory processes, self-regulatory attributes, and choices of participation, outcomes, and strategies. Self-efficacy, self awareness, and resourcefulness comprise the key attributes. Attributions, goal setting, and self-monitoring are the key processes.

Self-efficacy is the first self-regulatory attribute. It is not a critical piece in the phenomenon under consideration in this study. The principals in this study articulated a belief in their ability to master situations. There were some principals who expressed doubts about effectiveness in the role. Such doubt may decrease the self-

confidence to accomplish certain outcomes, but the principals seemed to articulate a renewed sense of possibility.

Self-awareness was the dominant self-regulatory attribute to the principals in this study. Principals described their high level of awareness of the outcomes of their behaviors and awareness of their abilities. Smith (2002) articulated the importance of accurate self-awareness on the self-regulatory learning processes. The principals communicated over and over the desire to gather feedback from multiple sources. The seeking of feedback can be viewed as a process of confirming and fostering self-awareness.

Resourcefulness is the ability to seek out learning aids to help meet a learning goal. The principals described a number of strategies to meet learning goals, including professional reading, conference attendance, and district programs. Most significant was the process of seeking out other principals to consult with on particular issues. According to Smith, self-regulated learners are more likely to seek assistance of expert guidance.

According to Smith (2001), the self-regulatory processes are what differentiate self-regulated learning because the processes lead to active involvement in learning. In this study, the researcher did not explore to which factors the principals attributed the causes of the outcome. Smith differentiated that individuals attribute success toward internal or external factors and the extent to which the learner has control of the outcome. Smith also differentiated learning goals between a performance goal

and a mastery goal. This study did not draw descriptions of whether the principal was motivated to meet a situation-specific learning goal or a long-term knowledge and skill enhancement. However, the orientation of the participants was toward long-term mastery even though the descriptions were typically about specific situations.

Self-monitoring is the third self-regulatory process presented in Smith's (2001) model and is critical to the choices the learner will make. "Self-monitoring is an important self-regulatory process because it focuses the learner on what is being learned and fosters reflective thinking" (p. 670). Self-monitoring processes focus the learner on the choices of strategies and outcomes. "A self-regulated learner consciously reflects on what might be the most effective way to master the learning goal and chooses an appropriate strategy to accomplish that goal" (p. 671). It is clear in this study that self-monitoring is important to the principals as they engage in self-directed learning. The principals consciously reflect on experience and implement strategies to accomplish learning goals.

Self-awareness and self-monitoring are critical processes in the learning-how-to-learn concept. According to Smith (1996), self-awareness, reflection, and self-monitoring are "the most important factors leading to effectiveness in lifelong learning" (p. 761). The principals in this study clearly spoke to their experiences with each of these critical professional processes. The principals described different strategies to regulate and modify their own thinking. Soliciting and using feedback are sources of information which influence the meaning-making process. Emotion

certainly influences the cognitive processes, as does the context of the work and learning.

The phenomena described in this study included how the principals guide their thinking, learning, and practice. The principals as learners and leaders described their experiences with developing and using knowledge of themselves and management of their work and learning. The principals described experiences in discovering strengths and weaknesses given the demands of the job, using their strengths to meet challenges and development in areas considered to be weakness. The principals develop awareness of themselves and their impact through reflection and feedback. Feedback from students, staff, and parents can be a powerful source to foster self-awareness. The principals organize and plan their learning and practice. They make hourly decisions about where to spend time and energy. Further, the principals described how the nature of the work and the decisions prompted reflection-on-practice. The ability to regulate the areas for productive reflective practice is critical to the learning process. Further, the principals described the ability to monitor the development of their own competence. They described the ability to decide what it is they want to learn and then implement strategies to meet those learning objectives.

Professional Practice

Professional practice includes exercising judgment based on professional learning. The principals in this study described how they have learned from

experiences from which to make professional judgments in the future. The belief is that a base of experiences is foundational to the ability to exercise judgment in practice. The principals described the importance of effectively learning from experiences so that they can make informed decisions in practice.

Principals must make judgments on limited information and with competing variables. The principals must make decisions with many competing variables, including the needs of students, teachers, and parents. Parents and students are long-term stakeholders with an emotional investment in their public school. When a principal talks with a parent about a student, he/she is talking about *your* student. When a principal discusses a behavior problem, it is *your child's* behavior. Meeting the needs of a student in the principal's perspective may not necessarily make the stakeholder happy with the decision.

Effective principals are able to develop an organized schema of experiences learned on the job upon which they draw to make effective professional judgments. The principals in this study also described how they seek input from others in this process as a way of drawing a second opinion on which to confirm and validate their thinking. The ability to exercise judgment includes seeking feedback, consulting with other principals, and drawing on previous experiences. Principals also draw on core values and underlying principles, such as what is best for the child and how a decision is aligned with the vision and direction of the school. The principals reflect on decisions to be made. They described how they use reflection as a way to consider

the decisions. The principals reflect on the impact and outcomes of decision, they reflect on the process of making decisions, and they reflect as a way to plan. All of this leads to the principal exercising professional judgments. Eraut (1994) defined professional judgment: "Judgment involves practical wisdom, a sense of purpose, appropriateness and feasibility; and its acquisition depends, among other things, on a wealth of professional experience" (p. 49). The principals described how they learn from experiences as a way to build the base on which to exercise judgment.

The principals use a combination of applied knowledge of education and leadership acquired through formal learning experiences, intuitive thinking, and judgment acquired through practice. Professionals must have a solid grounding in the field of education and what it means to be a principal. Principals must also have an intuitive grasp of the situation. The grasp of the situation emanates from the sense of purpose and wisdom. Eraut (1994) described the importance of having a broad base of experiences on which to draw, along with the ability to process those experiences so that the professional has the ability to draw upon the most salient features of the previous experiences. A new principal may have limited experiences to draw upon and therefore be limited in identifying the difference in situations. A principal with more experience and a well-organized mental schema may be more readily able to differentiate the nuances in situations and make a more reasoned judgment.

Eraut (1994) described the process of exercising judgment: "The process is best considered as deliberative rather than deductive, with an interactive consideration

of the interpretations of the situation together with possible actions continuing until a professional judgment is reached about the optimal course of action" (p. 114). The principals in this study described their deliberations about situations. They described their uncertainty. Some principals described how they draw upon theoretical learning from graduate school. The principals described that they often have insufficient information and they have gathered all the information they can. The principals described the need for speed to arrive at a decision, and they described their desire to consult with others in the process.

The Essences of the Phenomena

The purpose of this study was to describe the meaning of the experiences school principals have with learning from experiences, reflecting on practice, and monitoring their performance, learning, and practice. The essences of the structures of the experiences of how principals learn from experiences in practice are the ability to learn from experiences through reflective meaning construction, the principal's ability to regulate learning and practice, and the ability to exercise professional judgment in practice. The participant principals described the ability to reflect on practice and regulate learning and performance. A model of the development of professional expertise in the principalship that includes the phenomena that emerged from this research was developed by the researcher (see Figure 4).

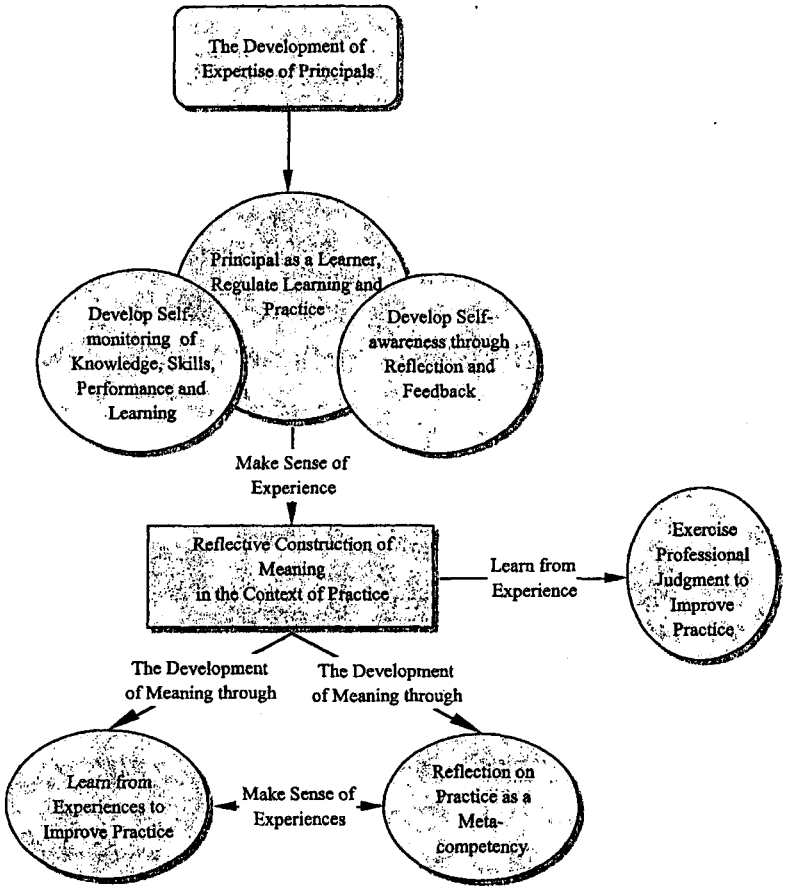

Figure 4. The Development of Expertise of Principals.

This study was concerned with describing the development of expertise. The researcher has been drawing on terminology from different literature bases. Each of the terms, such as knowledge, competence, and expertise, does not quite capture the fullness of the intended meanings. For the purposes of this study, the researcher adopted an interdisciplinary understanding of the term "expertise" that includes the intuitive thought processes that draw from broad knowledge base. When the participants in the study talked about becoming more competent, they described building a knowledge base of the profession from which to draw in practice. The participants did not use the terms "expertise," "competence," or "knowledge" with any regularity. The conception of expertise also includes the strong role of emotion. The participants described developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to do their jobs well.

Competence can be understood as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Eraut (1994) describes competence as a portion of the progression of lifelong professional learning toward expertise. Eraut uses the term "knowledge" to refer to the knowledge base of the profession which includes propositional and procedural knowledge. The distinction the researcher is drawing between professional competence and professional expertise is that expertise is a better fit to describe intuitive thought processes and deliberative judgments. Thus, the title of the model in Figure 4 is "The Development of Expertise of Principals."

An essence of this study was the ability to regulate learning and practice. The top three circles in Figure 4 describe the principal as a learner, self-monitoring processes, and the development of self-awareness. The abilities to regulate learning and monitor practice are critical components of how principals learn from experience in practice. Two key concepts are included in the phenomena under study. First, the principals are able to develop self-knowledge through reflection and feedback. Second, the principals are able to monitor performance and learning. Self-awareness and self-monitoring are critical to the principal as a learner. The principal as a learner, who regulates learning and practice, is depicted at the top portion of Figure 4.

Reflective construction of meaning cannot be separated from self-awareness and the process of self-monitoring. Self-awareness is developed through both reflection on performance and reflection on feedback. This relationship is depicted through the connection of self-awareness and reflective construction of meaning. The principals in this study actively sought feedback. The feedback is fuel for further reflection. Self-awareness and resourcefulness are key attributes from Smith's model that apply to this study.

Self-monitoring is inclusive of self-knowledge of strengths and weakness. Self-knowledge is acquired through reflection and feedback. Self-monitoring is also the ability to monitor the development of competence. According to Smith (2001), self-monitoring "focuses the learner on what is being learned and fosters reflective

thinking" (p. 670). Therefore, the principal as a learner regulates learning and practices self-monitoring.

As illustrated in the literature review, most models of expertise include the ability to reflect on practice. This study described how principals reflect on practice as a central way to learn from experience and make sense of situations. The principals make sense of experiences through reflection and use experience as a learning mechanism. Reflection can be considered as metacompetency for principals. Reflection on practice is the process of learning from experience and making sense of practice.

The knowledge that is constructed by the principal is the product of the activity, context, and culture in which it was created. The principal and the meaning-making process cannot be separated from the context in which it was created. The principal constructs a knowledge base in the context of practice. The reflective construction of meaning in the context of practice is used to represent how principals develop meaning through learning from experiences and reflecting on practice (see Figure 4).

Expertise includes the ability to learn from experiences in order to effectively exercise professional judgments in practice. The essence of the phenomena depicted in the model (see Figure 4) is the ability to exercise professional judgment in practice. Experts have a broad range of experiences which are organized into effective schema so that the professional can use the experience to focus on the important factors in the

current situation. Experts integrate prior knowledge and learning in daily practice. This study described how principals demonstrate another element of expertise, the ability to monitor their skills and knowledge.

A deeply reflective practitioner and highly effective learner does not necessarily make an effective principal. The improved practice is in the nature of the judgments that are made. This study begins to describe how principals can become more effective in learning from experiences so they can more readily exercise professional judgment. The principals make the best decisions or improve a situation by using strategies or tools that lead to effective judgments. Principals exercise judgment to improve the learning situation for all those involved. The model depicts that principals learn from experiences through reflective meaning making so that they exercise professional judgment.

Principals must exercise judgment in situations with competing variables. The student and teacher may not want the same things, the parent may want another. Each of the stakeholders has an emotional investment in the situation. The principal enters the situation in many cases because it has become a problem. The principal calls upon his or her base of experiences to make an informed qualitative judgment to improve the situation. The principal must intervene so that the student and parents as long-term stakeholders, who may be in the school district and the particular building for many years to come, have confidence in the program and staff.

The nature of the role of the principal influences the meaning-making process. A principal is the single leader for a school and as a result he/she is a manager, a supervisor, a community relations expert, a teacher, and a learner. Principals are "promoted" from classroom teacher to school leader and in many cases without intermediate career steps. The formal learning experiences through graduate programs no longer include an internship which would provide a time for apprenticeship with a practicing principal. Principals are limited to their prior experiences. Those participants in this study who had the opportunity to serve as an assistant principal spoke highly of the experience. Furthermore, the role is not structured in the same ways as some other professions. The ability to learn from experiences is critical toward developing increased competency in the role. Principals must be systematic in the learning in professional practice. Learning from experience, including learning from mistakes, is central. Reflection as a meaning-making process, self-awareness, and self-monitoring as key regulatory processes are the cornerstones to the systemic learning for principals.

Figure 4 builds upon Smith's (2001) self-regulation learning model with Daley's (2000) model of learning in continuing professional education to describe the learning approaches of the principals in this study. Reflection was a conscious choice of learning strategy by the principals in this study and takes on a central role as a learning and metacognitive strategy. The principals in this study took control of their own professional learning and regular self-assessment of their learning and

performance. The principals actively sought assistance through consulting with other principals and seeking feedback from key staff. They also sought out information to monitor their progress and evaluate their performance. This study builds on Daley's model by combining both the learner and context in the same model. The learner cannot be separated from the context of practice.

Discussion of the Implications

The primary implications of this study are for the principals and the participating school districts. The value of this study is for the principals as learners by providing a model of self-direction as a principal. The study also has value for the participating school district given that 15 of the 17 principals participated. The value of the study as a qualitative work is the opportunity to contribute to the theory and practice of the field of education administration. These contributions may serve the broader educational communities such as state departments of education and professional organizations.

The actual learning about being a principal comes from practice in the role as principal. Principals learn how to be principals by interacting with students and staff, planning professional development days, creating and leading school improvement plans, making decisions, solving problems, hiring teachers, evaluating teachers, etc. This is authentic learning of school leadership and is more than can ever be accomplished in certification programs. This study illustrates the need for school

districts to support principals as they authentically learn in context from practice. A number of possible strategies including reflective strategies, learning how to learn, collaborative inquiry, and communities of practice are proposed.

Reflective Strategies

Based upon the results of this study, strategies can be developed and implemented to support the development of the principals in the district. First, each of the principals described learning from experiences and reflecting on their practice. It is clear that this is something already in place in the district. It may be of benefit to consider specific strategies to further develop these existing and beneficial strategies. The principals described a range of reflective strategies. Given the importance of reflection as a metacompetency, it may help to provide opportunities to learn additional strategies. The principals will benefit from nurturing and mentoring in deep reflective practice in which reflection is supported and encouraged (Lemley, 1997).

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) described different strategies for gathering information about practice through reflective assessment. The strategies provide opportunities for the principals to reconstruct an experience in order to develop a richer understanding of the events and the meaning of the events. The practices will be described briefly here. A journal is a strategy that may serve this purpose. A number of the participants described using a journal to record important events and

incidents. Osterman and Kottkamp indicated that a journal can be a reflective assessment of events where the writer raises questions about these experiences.

Writing a record of a critical incident may also provide a format for reflecting on a problem. Each of the participants in this study quickly identified a critical incident within the last six months. "Several other questions prompt a reflective analysis of the thoughts and intentions that prompted the action and its impact: What did you hope to accomplish? What alternatives did you consider? What actions did you take? What happened as a result of your actions? Were your intended objectives achieved?" (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 53). Similar to the critical incident is a "left-hand column" strategy originally proposed by Argyris and Schon (1974) as a way to analyze a problematic situation. The strategy enables the individual to create a record of an event and in the left-hand column "script" what was thought and felt but left unsaid in the incident (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 56).

Portfolios are the third strategy for fostering reflective assessment. Portfolios are the opportunity to gather pieces of evidence of practice and reflect on them. Portfolios are increasing in currency in education given their use in the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification process. The attention on strategies for reflective assessment may help principals become more effective in their roles. Principals will become better at problem identification and solving, decision making, understanding situations and their reactions to the events, and foster

additional capacity to learn from experience. The goal is to create additional opportunities for principals to reflect effectively on their practice and solve problems.

This study did not truly examine the processes of critical reflection. Critical reflection by the principals is an area for further study and may also be an area for professional learning. The processes of critical reflection will enable the principals to become aware of the assumptions underlying their practice. Critical reflection occurs when the individual questions the validity of those assumptions. Transformative learning may occur when the individual revises the assumptions through critical reflection. An area of inquiry is how critical reflection occurs with principals and whether practice changes as a result. The integration of practice based on a revised set of assumptions and beliefs is an important area for inquiry.

Learning How to Learn

The principals in the district may also benefit from more attention on developing the learning-how-to-learn strategies. This study described the importance to the participants of the abilities to monitor and regulate their own practice, learning, and growth. The self-perception of competence is assisted by feedback. The principals in the study described the multitude of sources of feedback on their performance. Providing principals with strategies for utilizing the feedback as constructive sources of information to inform practice and growth would be beneficial.

The principals may also benefit from support in self-directed learning. Two concepts are important to self-regulated learning, self-awareness and self-monitoring. Self-awareness grows from reflection on practice and feedback. Providing tools for principals to convert their learning to increased self-awareness will be beneficial. Self-monitoring is paying attention to what is being learned and may foster reflection. The principals may become more conscious in how they reflect on practice as they develop greater sensitivity to monitoring their own growth, learning, and practice. In addition, the principals may develop more skills in monitoring what is learned and what needs to be learned.

The principals can utilize support with external motivation for learning, the external influences that motivate learning. The participants described in many different ways the external factors, such as feedback and the reactions of others, that prompted the need to learn. The participants described how they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and how the discrepancy between where they currently were professionally and where they wanted to be motivated them to learn. All of the feedback and demands can be overwhelming, and principals would benefit from a way to manage their learning.

Collaborative Inquiry

Throughout the interviews, participants talked about the need and desire to consult with other principals. Some seemed to yearn for more connection with other

principals, especially principals who work with similar kinds of students, such as Title I or bilingual students. The principals described the positive impact of the ability to consult with other principals. The concept of collaborative inquiry may be of value to the principals and the district.

Collaborative inquiry is a part of the family of action-oriented, experience-based inquiry methodologies. These methodologies allow participants to create new knowledge from life experiences within context. "Newly created knowledge becomes the basis of new action that is intended to create change in professional practice, organizational outcomes, or social democracies" (Kasl & Yorks, 2002, p. 4). Theoretically, action inquiry is consistent with situated cognition and experiential learning.

Collaborative inquiry is a process by which small groups learn from experience by focusing on a compelling question. Kasl and Yorks (2002) cited a definition of collaborative inquiry. "Collaborative inquiry is a systemic process [for learning from personal experience] consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance to them" (p. 4). The result is not just new learning; it is new action toward an end of improved professional practice, organizational outcomes, or societal change. These goals are consistent with the concerns expressed by the participants in this study.

Collaborative inquiry rests on participatory principals. Each participant is active in creating new meaning grounded in personal experience. Second, each

participant has equal power in decisions of the inquiry group. A common structure for collaborative inquiry includes the participants, the purpose of the inquiry, an inquiry question, the inquiry process, and the outcomes. Collaborative inquiry could begin with a group of four to six principals forming a group to answer a question of importance. A potential question for a small group of principals within this district might be "How can principals lead teachers to incorporate technology into the classroom?"or "How can principals use feedback to improve their practice?" The important issue is that the question is of interest to all the participants in the group and that the participants must be able to take action related to the question. The inquiry process is dedicated time for the principals to come together for multiple cycles of action and reflection. The intended outcomes would be improved professional practice through increased self-knowledge, shared strategies, expanded thinking, increased feelings of efficacy, creation of a professional network, and changes in behavior.

Learning in context is important to the principals in this study. Bray (2002) wrote about the power of collaborative inquiry as a professional development strategy in schools: "Collaborative inquiry furnishes a powerful learning strategy because it offers a context-sensitive methodology for learning our way out of workplace difficulties" (p. 84). Collaborative inquiry as professional development can impact the culture of a district.

Yorks and Kasl (2002) provide eight essential elements of the collaborative inquiry process. One, the group must frame an appropriate, important question. Two, the experiences of the participants are the basis for learning and meaning making. Three, the process includes cycles of action and reflection. Four, the participants are peers in the process. Five, learning includes multiple ways of knowing. Six, participants may need assistance facilitating distress. Seven, validity procedures are recurrent. And eight, the group must agree on criteria that will guide the group. These elements are instructive for the principals should they choose to participate.

Communities of Practice

A concept related to this study is communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) explored a social theory of learning and indicates the components of a social theory of learning include the following: meaning--learning as experience; practice--learning as doing; community--learning as participation; and identity--learning as becoming. Social participation is the process of learning and of knowing. Communities of practice integrate each of these components.

Communities of practice are firmly rooted in the theory of situated learning, and reflective practice. According to Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003), communities of practice reflect situated learning in four ways. One, the shared inquiry and learning reside in the authentic issues and problems of practice. Two, the

application of new knowledge to practice is the evaluation of effectiveness of the approach. Three, a community of practice enables meaning making from lived experiences. And finally, learning occurs in the social relationships with other members of the community.

The principals are already a part of a community of practice. "Learning that takes place in social groups is a defining characteristic of a social theory known as communities of practice" (Merriam, Courtenay, & Baumgartner, 2003, p. 171). The principals already learn together, and some principals expressed the desire for it to happen more often. Some participants yearned for more collaborative problem solving, while others sought connection with colleagues. Wenger (1998) indicates, "Communities of practice should not be reduced to purely instrumental purposes. They are about knowing, but also about being together, living meaningfully, developing a satisfying identity and altogether being human" (p. 145).

Communities of practice bring together learning from experience, meaning making, participation, and personal growth. The community of principals can come together to create meaning together through dialogue about their experiences. Wenger (1998) indicated that "learning is the engine of practice and practice is the history of that learning" (p. 96). Principals can improve their existing practices "through regular opportunities for collaborative reflection and inquiry through dialogue; and ultimately, it develops common tools, language, images, roles, assumptions, understandings, and a shared world view" (Wesley & Buysse, 2001, p.

118). Communities of practice share the processes of reflection, inquiry, and dialogue about professional practice with collaborative inquiry. Wesley and Buysse contended that communities of practice are more likely to make an impact on education because they can foster interdisciplinary and cross-functional development of expertise.

Contributions and Recommendations for Further Study

This study contributes to the fields of education administration and adult education by describing how principals learn from experience situated in practice. The study makes three primary contributions. One, the study described the reflective meaning-making processes and how principals construct meaning through experience and learning. Two, the study revealed the self-regulatory processes and attributes principals use to monitor learning and performance. And third, the study described the deliberative process of exercising professional judgment.

The study described how principals make sense of experiences within practice through knowledge creation and personal meaning making. Reflection on practice can be described as a metacompetency in the professional practice of principals. A metacompetency enables the profession to develop and use other competencies. The description of reflection on practice as a metacompetency that enables more effective performance is a key aspect of the reflective construction of meaning for principals.

Each of the participants regularly engaged in reflection to understand current experiences and to learn from experiences. The principals create meaning for

themselves by reflecting on experiences. The principals reflect on their own performance and leadership. The principals described the experiences of reflecting as a way of planning, problem solving, and decision making. The principals question themselves in practice as a way of thinking about their practice.

This study also provides evidence that the experiences of the principals are inherently valuable to the learning process. There is evidence that the principals reflect critically on experiences and make more informed actions as a result. As Matthew stated, "It affirmed to me that learning to become a good principal requires you to be in that position." Critical reflection on experiences creates valuable learning experiences that lead to more informed actions.

Another key aspect of the reflective construction of meaning by principals is the context of practice. Principals learn as a result of the interaction of self and context. The knowledge that is created through reflection is situated in the specific context in which it was created. The knowledge is the product of the context, culture, and activity. The context of practice is especially important because this study illustrated how feedback from others fuels the meaning-making process. The contributions of this study to the meaning-making processes of principals are the importance of feedback, the interaction of the principal and the context of practice, the nature of critical reflection on experiences, and the determination that reflection on practice enables more effective practice.

The second area of contributions of this study is the descriptions of the principals as learners and the processes on monitoring and regulating performance and practice. The principals regulate their own learning, development, and problem solving. The principals described how they monitor their own practice and learning. The descriptions included how the principals evaluate their own practice through reflection on evidence, feedback, and monitoring others. The principals also described how they monitor their own strengths and weaknesses.

The principals in this study use feedback from multiple sources as a way to learn. It is this feedback that assists the principals with self-perception of performance. Feedback is the process of confirming an accurate self-assessment of performance, knowledge, and skills. The participants monitor the reactions and responses of a variety of sources to fuel their learning. The principals in this study often consult with others as a way to learn and exercise judgments. Self-knowledge of skills, strengths, and weaknesses lead to reflection. Self-awareness is acquired through reflection and feedback. The principals also engaged in the process of self-monitoring. Self-monitoring leads to active involvement in learning. Self-monitoring fosters reflective thinking and focuses the principals on the outcomes. Self-monitoring and self-awareness are elements of professional expertise.

The principals use a variety of learning strategies to meet their professional responsibilities. The principals described their learning strategies to develop professional competence. Strategies included formal learning experiences such as

conferences and district programs, professional literature, and networking with other principals. The principals also described experiences directing their own learning. The second contribution of this study is the description of how principals guide their thinking, learning, and practice. The descriptions of self-monitoring processes to foster reflection and the role of feedback and reflection in the development of self-awareness are unique contributions.

The description of how the principals exercise judgment in practice is the third key contribution of this study. The principals described the deliberative process of reflecting on decisions. The principals reflect on the decision-making process, the outcomes of the process, and the impact of the decision. Learning from prior experiences contributes to the ability to make good decisions in the future. Evidence of professional expertise is in how the prior learning is organized into mental schemas so that it is readily recalled and used in accurate problem identification. Problem recognition and analysis, well-developed knowledge and skills, and well-organized information are all elements of professional expertise. The study provides rich descriptions of how principals build a base of experiences and use them in deliberative judgments.

Figure 5 is a representation of a number of questions principals may ask in considering their practice. The tool was developed to serve principals by illustrating questions that facilitate reflection on practice. Each set of questions is tied to components of the Model of the Development of Expertise (see Figure 4). The lists

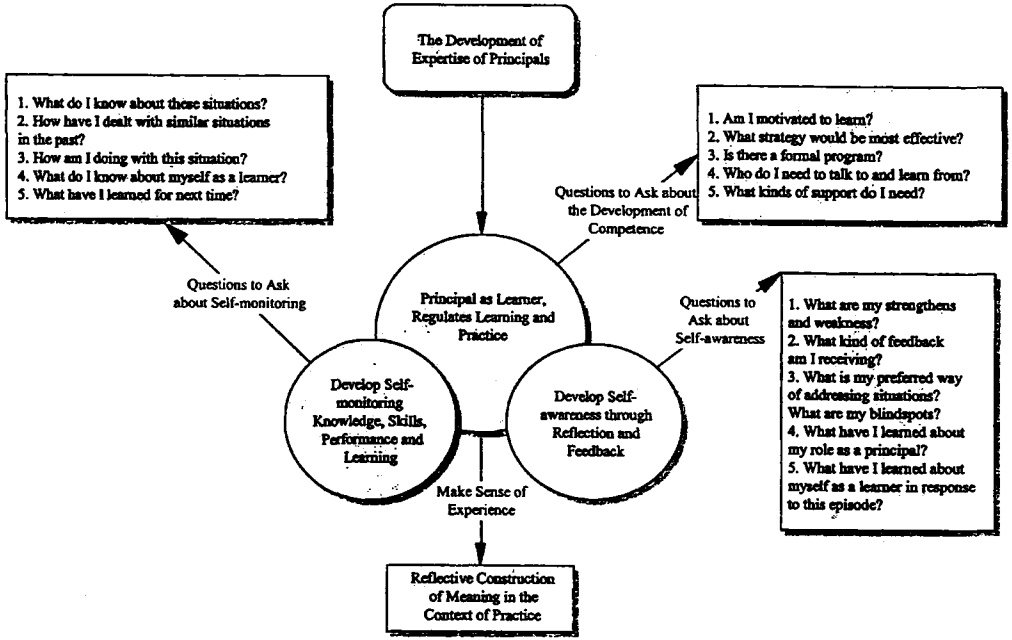

Figure 5. Questions to Consider About the Development of Expertise of Principals. (continued on following page)

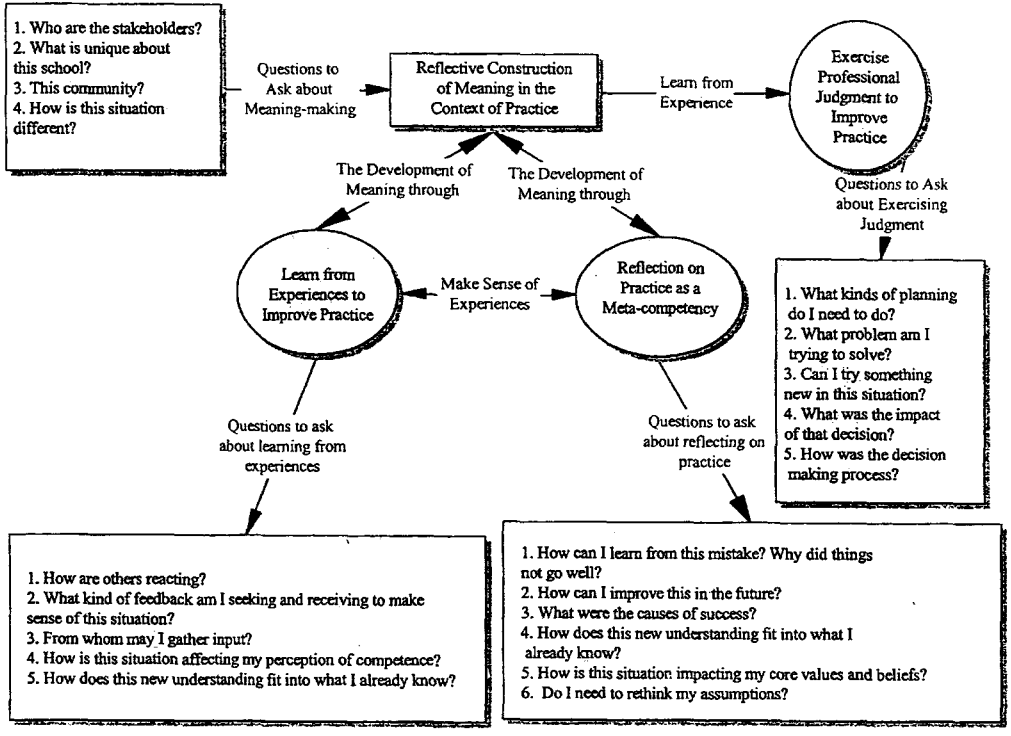

Figure 5 (continued).

of questions are not exhaustive. The questions should inform the meaning of Figure 4 as well as inform the practice of principals. More importantly, it is a comprehensive model of principals as learners, how principals learn from experiences through reflective practice, and how reflecting on experiences can develop new meaning and inform judgments. The model illustrates the connections of how principals learn from experience, how principals monitor understanding and practice, and how principals critically reflect on experiences. The value and utility of this model and tool are the holistic nature of the examination of the nature of being a principal.

A number of questions emerge as areas for further study. Areas for further study are in the nature of reflective construction of meaning, the principal as learner, and exercising judgment. Within the areas for further study in the nature of reflective construction of meaning, multiple issues emerge, including how principals integrate new understandings into practice, the processes of critical reflection, and how principals use feedback.

One of the questions this study intended to explore was how principals integrate new understandings into practice. During the study, the participants responded to this question from the perspective of an instructional leader rather than as a learner. This remains an important question in understanding how the principals bring new understanding into their practice and how the information is organized and used.

Transformational learning is an area for further study. Transformative learning is a constructivist learning process that was not fully explored in this study. This study provides evidence that the principals do critically reflect on experiences. Further study into the nature of critical reflection would be beneficial. The focus of the study would be on the nature of the assumptions the principals hold, under what conditions the assumptions are surfaced and challenged, whether or not the principal reframes the assumption, and whether practice changes as a result of a reframed assumption. The intended outcomes of the study could be the kinds of tools principals need to benefit from learning from experiences through critical reflection and how preparation programs can prepare candidates for the position.

Another possibility is to have principals describe critical incidents that fostered disorienting dilemmas. The study would explore the nature of critical reflection and re-evaluation of assumptions about the nature of the role. The purpose of the study would be to describe the shifts in meaning perspectives and meaning schemas of principals. One question to be answered is whether principals critically reflect as described in the literature. Is there evidence in the data that principals test assumptions and engage in dialogic interaction?

Feedback from multiple sources was described as useful to the principals in this study. Feedback assists the principals with accurate self-assessment and fosters reflective thinking. Further study into how principals gather and use feedback could be informative. The goal of the study would be to understand how principals use and

acquire feedback to generate knowledge. An element of expertise is the ability to differentiate sources of information for value. Principals can become overwhelmed by the feedback. How do the principals determine the most useful and relevant feedback?

The study illustrates the role of the context of practice in the reflective construction of meaning of principals. Principals learn as a result of the interaction of self and context. Knowledge is situated in the specific context in which it was created and is the product of the context. An area for further study is the interaction of the principal and the context of practice. Specifically, it is important to study how the awareness of self is affected by context of practice. How is the development of self-awareness affected by the context of practice? How do issues of race, class, or gender of the principal affect the development of self-awareness? What are the relationships among the use of feedback; interpersonal interactions; and the race, class, or gender of the principal?

This study illustrated the power and importance of emotion in learning. Emotions are an important part in the motivation to learn and are also inhibitors to learning. In this study, the participants shared their feelings about their work and how reflection can be an emotional process. A more detailed study of the role of emotion on the construction of meaning may be important.

A second area for further study is the dimensions of principals as learners. Self-regulation of learning was a primary finding in this study. Other facets of

Smith's (1996) model of self-regulated learning could be explored. What are the self-regulatory processes principals use to lead to involvement in learning? This study described self-monitoring processes. To what extent do principals use goal setting and attribution processes? Are the principals more drawn to internal or external factors? Are principals more involved in mastery learning or performance goals? What are the self-regulatory attributes possessed by principals? This study described self-awareness. Additional study into how principals develop self-awareness would be informative. Additional study of the cycle of the development of self-awareness is needed. How does feedback confirm and foster self-awareness as a learner? What are the descriptions of self-efficacy and resourcefulness? How do principals choose learning strategies? Under which circumstances do principals choose to participate in learning? This is a fruitful area for further study.

A third area for further study is, given descriptions of self-regulated learning and reflective meaning making, does it make a real difference in professional practice? Are the judgments made by principals who are reflective and effective learners qualitatively better than less reflective principals? What strategies or tools can help principals make the best decisions or improve a situation? Principals must exercise judgment in difficult situations. What base of experiences does the principal call upon to make an informed qualitative judgment to improve the situation? Descriptions of how principals build, organize, and recall a base of experiences in deliberative professional practice will inform the development of expertise.

Conclusions

This study takes models of learning in continuing professional education and applies them to a particular group of principals. The study, then, is descriptive of the principals as learners and the meaning-making processes used to learn from experiences. It is descriptive of the unique professional practice of principals.

This study represents an ontology of the principalship. It describes the nature of being a principal to discover the knowledge construction process. The study illustrates a fundamental premise of learning. "Learning is a constructive process that occurs best when what is being learned is relevant and meaningful to the learner and when the learner is actively engaged in creating his or her own knowledge and understanding by connecting what is being learned with prior knowledge and experience" (Lambert & McCombs, 1998, p. 10). By closely describing the experiences of current principals, the researcher can suggest theoretical implications. The study also lays the foundation for the next stages of research which could be a survey for wide distribution to principals to further develop the contentions of this study.

Reflection on practice is a discipline of school leadership. Reflective construction of meaning is critical to the growth and development of principals in the field. The ability to reflect on practice and regulate thoughts and actions is essential to learning and development (Alexander & Murphy, 1998). The principals in this study described openness to reflect on their own practice, performance, and learning.

Reflection serves as a critical component of the development of expertise of principals. There is evidence in this study that the principals critically reflect on experiences and surface assumptions that frame practice.

The essential contribution of this study is the role of self-regulation in this process. Principals who purposely reflect on their own performance and then apply what they learn as a result will continue to grow as professionals and improve their practice.

This study also illustrates how professional practice and growth is shaped and influenced by the specific context of practice. An area for further study is an examination of the impact of contextual forces on the learning and perceptions of competence of principals.

The role of the principal is central to the quality of schools. Paying attention to the quality of current principals as well as principal candidates is important to school improvement. As schools and students continue to change, the principals who lead and serve them must grow along with them. School leaders must develop new knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the schools and the communities they serve. Attention must be paid to the development of expertise of school principals.

This study provides insight into current principals as learners. The study described how principals learn from experiences, make meaning of experiences through reflective practice, regulate learning and performance, and exercise judgment based on acquired experiences. The study demonstrated that principals do learn from

experiences and develop new knowledge and insights and are therefore better able to solve the problems of practice. The principals also described how they reflect on practice and how they critically examine experiences to surface and test underlying assumptions. This study also provides insight into how principals monitor their understanding and practice.

The study provides a model of the development of expertise for principals. The model builds on existing models. The model integrates learning in continued professional education with self-regulation learning. Key components of the model include how principals construct meaning through reflection, how knowledge construction is situated in practice, how critical reflection of experience transforms understanding, and how the learner regulates performance and learning. Learning is derived from the daily experiences of school leadership. This study described how principals use reflective strategies to learn from experiences.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This study is concerned with school principals as learners and how principals can learn from on- the-job experiences. Learning from experience will help the principal develop knowledge and skills so that the principal develops expertise along the career life span. The aspect of the continuing professional education that I propose to study is the development of expertise through reflective practice. Experts have the ability to reflect on their learning and knowledge. This study is to provide a rich description of how principals learn from on-the-job experiences through reflective practices and how reflection can develop the knowledge and skills to develop competence. The knowledge gained from this study may help to inform the continuing professional education practices of school principals.
You will be asked to participate in an open-ended interview. The interview questions seek your experiences with reflective practice and learning from experience. The interview should take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete, and with your permission will be audio taped. Please sign below to indicate your consent for the interview to be audio taped.

_____ _____

Signature Today's Date

There is a risk that the interview could evoke some upsetting thoughts, feelings, or memories for you. If you feel upset during or after the study, the experimenter will be available to talk with you. You are reminded that your participation is voluntary. This means that you can choose to stop at any time without penalty.

All of the information obtained from your participation will be kept confidential. Your consent form will be kept separate from the data and the data will not be available to anyone other than the experimenters conducting the study. General descriptions may be included in my report, but the specific identity of you or your school will not be reported.

If you have any questions or concerns related to your participation in this study, please call Eric G. McLaren at 630-907-5053. Any questions about your rights as a research participant can be addressed to the NIU Office of Research Compliance (815-753-8588). Additional questions about the research may be directed to the Advisor, Dr. Gene Roth at 815-753-1448.

"I have read the information about the study and have been informed of it's general purpose. I am fully aware of the risks and benefits associated with participating in the study described to me. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the informed consent form and agree to participate in The study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty."

Print name	Today's Date
Signature	ID#

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section One

What is your age?

What is your gender? Ethnicity?

How many years have you been an educator? How many years have you been a principal?

What are you areas of certification and graduate study?

What are your areas of strength?

What knowledge areas do you think you need to improve?

Section Two

How do you learn from experiences?

Please describe your experience with reflective practice,

What was that experience like for you?

Please describe the meaning of your experiences with reflection.

Think back over the last six months and identify an incident at work that you remember as causing you the greatest discomfort, pressure, or difficulty. Please describe the incident and how you learned from it.

What strategies do you use to develop an evolving level of competence?

How do you monitor your understanding, practice, and the development of competence?

How do you integrate new understandings into practice?

How do you reframe your understandings based on experiences?

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT SEEKING APPROVAL

December 1, 2003

Dr.
Superintendent
School District

Dear Dr.:

As we discussed earlier in the school year, I am completing a study entitled "The Development of Professional Expertise Through Reflection in the Principalship" to meet the requirements for a doctorate in Education. I am seeking your approval to invite the participation of the principals in the school district.

I propose to study the development of professional expertise through reflective practice. This study is concerned with school principals as learners and how principals can learn from on the job experiences. This study is to provide a rich description of how principals learn from on the job experiences and how reflection can lead to the development of professional competence. The study will examine how principals learn from experience, how principals monitor their understanding and practice, how principals integrate new understandings into practice, and how principals reframe their understandings based on experiences.

Learning from experience helps principals develop knowledge and skills so that the principal develops expertise along the career life span. Experts have the ability to reflect on their learning and knowledge. The role of the principal is increasing in demands and principals have limited time to engage in formal professional development learning experiences. The ability to learn from practice is essential in meeting the increasing complexity and ambiguity of the role.

I believe this study will contribute to the knowledge base on how principals develop expertise through reflecting on their practice. The study will provide a close examination of the phenomena of reflective practice and provide insights towards a model to inform the practice of principals. The selection of study participants from one district will provide a unique cohort for analysis. In addition, this study will make an unique contribution to the literature by drawing together the fields of Education Administration and Adult Education.

The focus of the interview is to gather detailed examples of when the principal engages in reflective practice. I will ask the participants to describe in detail examples of their experiences with reflective practice A portion of the interview will be

dedicated to gathering demographic information. A second aspect of the interview is to gather data on the nature of reflection engage in by the participant in an effort to discern how the participants monitor their practice and understanding. The interviews will be open-ended and unstructured, and will last 60-90 minutes. All interviews will be face to face and will be tape-recorded. The interview data will be converted to transcription for the purpose of analysis.

I look forward to your response to this request. I would be happy to meet with you and your staff to discuss this research project. Included with this letter is a copy of the University approved Consent Form and Interview Questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Eric G. McLaren
Principal
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO PRINCIPALS INVITING PARTICIPATION

December 16, 2003

Mr.
Principal
Elementary School
Address

Dear Mr.:

Thank you for your time this morning. I am completing a study entitled "The Development of Professional Expertise through Reflection in the Principalship" to meet the requirements for a doctorate in education. I propose to study the development of professional expertise through reflective practice. This study is concerned with school principals as learners and how principals can learn from on the job experiences.

The role of the principal is increasing in demands and principals have limited time to engage in formal professional development learning experiences. This study is to provide a rich description of how principals learn from on the job experiences and how reflection can lead to the development of professional competence. The study will examine how principals learn from experience, how principals monitor their understanding and practice, how principals integrate new understandings into practice, and how principals reframe their understandings based on experiences.

Interviews with current principals are a vital component of this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. I hope you will agree to participate. I will contact you within the next week to arrange a time and date for the interview. The interview will be conducted at your school unless you prefer an alternate location. All interviews will be treated confidentially. Your specific identity will not be reported.

As a school principal, I appreciate the many demands on your time. Your participation in this interview may provide a needed time to reflect on your practice. I appreciate your cooperation and thank you in advance for considering particiation in my research project. You may reach me during the day at (630) 907-5053 or in the evening at (630) 907-0527.

Sincerely,

Eric G. McLaren
Principal
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

APPENDIX E

LETTER TO BOARD PRESIDENT

April 15, 2004

School Board President
School District

Dear Mr.:

During the months of January and February, I had the opportunity to visit 15 of the 17 school buildings in District X to interview the school Principals. Dr. [Superintendent] agreed to allow me to conduct a study entitled "The Development of Professional Expertise through Reflection in the Principalship" to meet the requirements for a doctorate in education. The purpose of this letter is to offer some initial observations on the interviews and the visits.

I visited the schools on some of the coldest and snowiest days of the winter. In all cases, I was greeted by a clean and safe entry. The facilities improvements in recent years ensure a warm welcome to visitors. Snow and ice removal was completed as we all would expect and the cleanup of hundreds of students entering a building with wet shoes had occurred. In one case, I visited a school on the first day of the water boil order. All of the precautions were in place to ensure that students had safe water. The commitment to safety is clear. In all but one case, I had to be buzzed in through a locked door. I appreciate the commitment to ensuring that our children are safe and secure in school, and the staff greet visitors with warmth and professionalism.

I am thankful for the opportunity to meet and interview so many dedicated professionals. The principals have a passion and a commitment to serve their students and communities. I heard a strong commitment to ensuring that all students succeed. They expressed passion about serving low-income students and bilingual students. I heard and felt a commitment to meet the needs of a diverse population. As a lifelong resident of Aurora, it was great to be in virtually all of the school buildings in the district.

The principals shared their vision for educational vision within their buildings during our interviews. I heard about the important programmatic decisions that are made at the local level with input from parents, students, and staff. Site-based management is apparent to me. Taking appropriate risk to foster student learning and achievement appear to be support and fostered. I felt that the principals viewed their success as a professional with the success of the school as a whole.

The principals exhibited a high degree of professional awareness. Each principal is committed to his/her development as a school leader. They are aware of their strengths and areas for growth and actively monitor their own progress and performance. Through these interviews it is apparent to me that the district is also committed to developing school leaders.

The study will provide a close examination of the phenomena of reflective practice and provide insights towards a model to inform the practice of principals. The selection of study participants from one district will provide a unique cohort for analysis by examing how principals learn from experience, monitor their understanding and practice, integrate new understandings into practice, and reframe their understandings based on experiences. Upon completion, this study should provide a rich description of how principals learn from on the job experiences and how reflection can lead to the development of professional competence. I would be happy to share with you the results of the study on the development of professional expertise through reflective practice when the analysis is complete.

We all know that the role of the principal is increasing in demands, complexity, and ambiguity. My initial perceptions based on these visits and interviews are that district principals are developing the knowledge and skills necessary for the role and have resources to do so. Based on the interviews, it is clear to me that the principals act in the best interest of their students. It is a joy to be a parent, a community member, and a colleague of a group of dedicated principals.

I thank you for the opportunity to meet with each of the principals and I look forward to the opportunity to share the analysis of the findings of my study.

Sincerely,

Eric G. McLaren
Principal
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

APPENDIX F

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS SEEKING

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT REVIEW

May 21, 2004

Mr.
Principal
Elementary School
Address

Dear:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me earlier this semester. At this time I have conducted 15 interviews. Attached is the transcription from our interview. Please take a few moments to read through the transcript to look for obvious errors or misunder- standings. Please call or return the transcript with any corrections. This part of the process is called a member check and is used to establish the trustworthiness of the data. As we agreed, the interviews will be treated confidentially and your specific identity will not be reported.

I am currently in the process of analyzing the interviews. Based on my initial analysis the interviews will provide key insights into the development of professional expertise through reflective practice. I appreciated hearing about your experiences as a principal and as a learner.

I appreciate your cooperation and thank you for participation in my research project. You may reach me during the day at (630) 907-5053 or ericmac@imsa.edu. I hope you have a productive a rewarding close to the school year.

Sincerely,

Eric G. McLaren
Principal
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

APPENDIX G

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS SEEKING TEST FOR SUFFICIENCY OF THEMES

August 25, 2004

Mr.
Principal
Elementary School
Address

Dear:

I enjoyed the opportunity to present the initial analysis of the interviews with District X principals at the Administrator Retreat on August 5th. I would appreciate your feedback on the data analysis I presented at that time. As I mentioned, your feedback on the sufficiency of the analysis is a critical part of establishing the credibility of the study. Please let me know if the themes I presented on the "Descriptions of the Phenomena" slides 18-29 sufficiently reflect the information you shared. I have included the slides on the themes with this note.

My goal is to accurately reflect the information you shared in the interviews and to write a rich description about the phenomena. I am in the process of writing that description using quotations from the interviews to support each of the themes. I would like your feedback on whether you believe I got it right. Please take a few moments to review the slides and reflect on the information you shared to identify whether there are critical gaps in the identified themes. I look forward to your feedback.

I appreciate your cooperation and thank you for particiation in my research project. You may reach me during the day at (630) 907-5053 or ericmac@imsa.edu. I hope you have a great start to the school year.

Sincerely,

Eric G. McLaren
Principal
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy